

BFI

OCTOBER 2016 VOLUME 26 ISSUE 10

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

Sight & Sound



TROUBLE IN THE HEARTLAND: ANDREA ARNOLD'S

AMERICAN HONEY

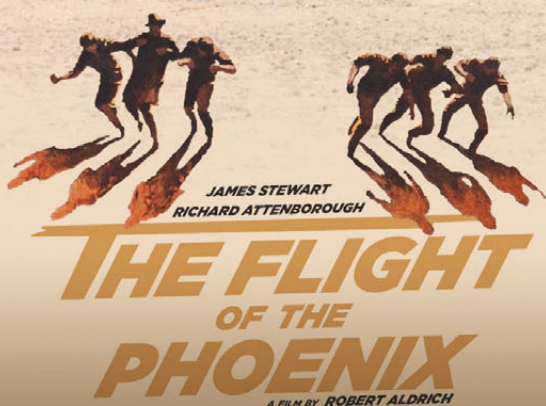
PLUS

- THE FEMALE ROAD MOVIE ● THE LIFE OF KIRK DOUGLAS ● JOHN CARPENTER INTERVIEW
- LONDON FILM FESTIVAL PREVIEW ● IRA SACHS ● HOLLYWOOD IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

£4.50

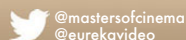


The **Masters of Cinema** Series



One of Hollywood's toughest and most idiosyncratic filmmakers, **Robert Aldrich** had one of his greatest and most cherished popular successes with the thrilling adventure classic *The Flight of the Phoenix*, headlined by an all-star cast including **James Stewart** and **Richard Attenborough**.

Available on Blu-ray for the first time in the UK, September 2016.



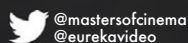
AVAILABLE FROM
amazon.co.uk

“PATHS OF GLORY”

The **Masters of Cinema** Series

A shattering masterpiece by one of the medium's greatest artists, Stanley Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* starring Kirk Douglas announced the definitive arrival of a towering figure in cinema.

Available on Blu-ray for the first time in the UK, September 2016.



AVAILABLE FROM
amazon.co.uk





Path of glory: Kirk Douglas

As the actor approaches his 100th birthday, we celebrate his extraordinary career, which saw him play a host of classic roles from ruthless villains to ambiguous mavericks. By **Philip Kemp**

REGULARS

5 **Editorial** Poll position

Rushes

- 6 **In the frame:** **Nathalie Morris** on an exhibition of Ealing's film posters
- 8 **Object Lesson:** **Hannah McGill** discusses manuscripts in the movies
- 9 **Interview:** **Isabel Stevens** talks to *Baden Baden* director Rachel Lang
- 10 **Interview:** **Olivia Howe** meets Babak Anvari, the director of acclaimed Farsi-language horror film *Under the Shadow*
- 12 **Preview:** **Nick James** looks ahead to this year's BFI London Film Festival
- 15 **Dispatches:** **Mark Cousins** gets under the skin of Scarlett Johansson's fame

The Industry

- 16 **Development Tale:** **Charles Gant** on *The Girl with All the Gifts*

- 17 **The Numbers:** **Charles Gant** listens to independent cinema's summertime blues

Wide Angle

- 50 **Preview:** **Sophie Mayer** celebrates feminist renegade Lizzie Borden
- 52 **Soundings:** **Sam Davies** unravels the mysteries of Italian dubbing
- 53 **Primal Screen:** **Geoff Brown** curls up with *Kitty*, the first British 'goat-glander'
- 54 **Festival:** **Kieron Corless** reports on the highlights of this year's Locarno

Letters

Endings

- 112 **Martyn Conterio** explores the melancholy final moments of New Hollywood epic *Heaven's Gate*

FEATURES

18

COVER FEATURE

Wandering star

Andrea Arnold's new film *American Honey* follows the adventures of a young woman who takes a road trip into the poverty-stricken hinterlands of the US Midwest. By **Simran Hans** PLUS **Kim Morgan** surveys cinema's other tales of women on the road

32

Boys in the hood

The burgeoning friendship between a pair of 13-year-old boys is threatened when a bitter feud develops between their parents, in Ira Sachs's *Little Men*. By **Graham Fuller**

36

My father the hero

Víctor Erice's incomplete 1983 film *El sur*, the tale of a young girl's relationship with her distant father, is regarded by many as a masterpiece. By **Mar Diestro-Dópido**

40

Blood on the tracks

John Carpenter, one-time powerhouse of genre cinema from *Halloween* to *Escape from New York*, talks about growing up in the Jim Crow south, and his love of Hammer and Howard Hawks. By **Geoffrey Macnab**

46

Desert rats

In a far cry from the bleak satirical brilliance of the best Hollywood war films, a recent quartet of limp studio titles shamelessly exploits the instability in the Middle East for stories of white Americans finding themselves. By **Violet Lucca**

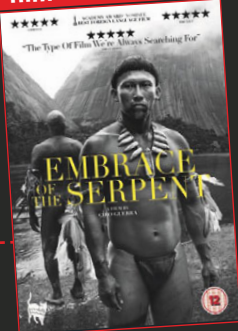


new films

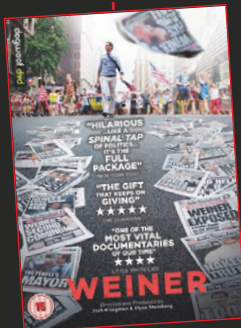


embrace of the serpent
also available on blu-ray
released 12/09/16

film of the month



weiner
out now



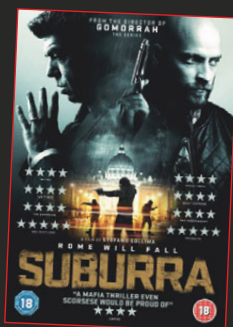
author: the jt lero story
released 19/09/16



departure
released 26/09/16



suburra
also available on blu-ray
released 05/09/16



a hologram for the king
also available on blu-ray
released 19/09/16



the nice guys
also available on blu-ray
released 26/09/16



ingrid bergman: in her own words
released 19/09/16

summertime
released 12/09/16



the commune
released 10/10/16



the ardennes
released 26/09/16



honeymoon
released 26/09/16



the fopp list

get the lowdown on the best new films
in this month's edition of the fopp list,
free magazine in-store now

while stocks last

**the
fopp
list**



foppofficial

#gettofopp

fopp.com

fopp stores

bristol college green
cambridge sidney st
edinburgh rose st
glasgow union st & byres rd
london covent garden
manchester brown st
nottingham broadmarsh
shopping centre
oxford gloucester green

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE BFI

Editorial enquiries

21 Stephen Street London W1T 1LN

t: 020 7255 1444

w: bfi.org.uk/sightandsound

e: S&S@bfi.org.uk

Social media

f: facebook.com/SightSoundmag

t: twitter.com/SightSoundmag

Subscriptions

t: 020 8955 7070

e: sightandsound@

abacusemedia.com

Volume 26 Issue 10 (NS)

ISSN 0037-4806 USPS 496-040

CONTRIBUTORS

Michael Atkinson's books include *Ghosts in the Machine: The Dark Heart of Pop Cinema*

Nikki Baughan is a freelance journalist, critic and copy editor

Geoff Brown writes on film and classical music for the *Times*

Martyn Conterio is the author of a monograph on Mario Bava's *Black Sunday*

Sam Davies is a freelance writer

Graham Fuller is a freelance film critic based in New York

Simran Hans is a freelance writer and programmer for the Bechdel Test Fest

Olivia Howe works at the BFI and is one half of the Final Girls, a collective exploring feminist themes in horror cinema.

Trevor Johnston is a freelance film critic

Violet Lucca is digital editor of *Film Comment*

Philip Kemp is a freelance writer and film historian

Geoffrey Macnab's most recent book is *Screen Epiphanies*

Sophie Mayer is the author of *Political Animals: The New Feminist Cinema*

Fintan McDonagh is working on a book about Edward Dmytryk

Kim Morgan is a critic and programmer and writes about film at sunsetgun.typepad.com

Nathalie Morris is senior curator of special collections at the BFI National Archive

Christina Newland is a freelance writer on cinema

Adam Nayman is the author of *Showgirls: It Doesn't Suck*

Nick Pinkerton is a New York-based film critic and programmer

Catherine Wheatley is a lecturer in film studies at King's College, London

COVER

Design by Alex Williamson
www.alexwilliamson.co.uk

NEXT ISSUE

on sale 11 October

Contents Reviews

FILMS OF THE MONTH

- 58 *Baden Baden*
60 *The Girl with All the Gifts*
62 *Swiss Army Man*
64 *Théo and Hugo*

FILMS

- 66 *Aloys*
67 *Ambulance*
67 *Bad Moms*
68 *The Beatles: Eight Days a Week – The Touring Years*
68 *Ben-Hur*
69 *Blair Witch*
70 *The Blue Room*
71 *The Brother*
71 *Captain Fantastic*
72 *The Clan*
73 *Courted*
74 *Dare to Be Wild*
74 *The Fencer*
75 *The First Monday in May*
75 *Free State of Jones*
76 *Gary Numan: Android in La La Land*
78 *The Greasy Strangler*
78 *Hell or High Water*
79 *Hunt for the Wilderpeople*
80 *Imperium*
81 *The Infiltrator*
81 *Kubo and the Two Strings*
82 *League of Gods*
83 *Life on the Road*
84 *Little Men*
85 *The Lovers & the Despot*
85 *Nine Lives*
86 *The 9th Life of Louis Drax*
88 *Sausage Party*
88 *Sour Grapes*
89 *Southside with You*
90 *Suicide Squad*
90 *Supersonic*
91 *Tharlo*
92 *Two Women*
92 *Under the Shadow*
93 *War Dogs*
94 *War on Everyone*

HOME CINEMA

- 97 *Around China with a Movie Camera, Conversation Piece, Cry of the City, The Early Works of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Gorilla Bathes at Noon, Hangmen Also Die!, Horace & Pete, The Immortal Story, Kiss of Death, Suture, Lee Tracy RKO 4-Film Collection, The World of Kanako*

DVD features

- 96 **Trevor Johnston** applauds a release of Czech New Wave masterpiece *The Shop on the High Street*
99 **Revival: Philip Kemp** on the hand-grenade that was *The Ox-Bow Incident*
103 **Lost and found: Fintan McDonagh** rediscovers Edward Dmytryk's British film *Give Us This Day*
100 **Television: Robert Hanks** watches Shakespeare's history plays televised, then and now

BOOKS

- 104 **Christina Newland** wonders what James Dean was really like
105 **Isabel Stevens** is spaced out by the design of 2001: *A Space Odyssey*
106 **Nick Pinkerton** salutes Hasse Ekman, once Bergman's great rival
106 **Michael Atkinson** digs into the world of lost films



And online this month Víctor Erice and Kirk Douglas video tributes | *Star Trek* at 50 | Mohamed Khan | LFF preview | Toronto, Venice and Encounters reviews and more bfi.org.uk/sightandsound



THEY WERE KIDNAPPED BY THEIR BIGGEST FAN

THE LOVERS & THE DESPOT



**"GRIPPING.
THIS REAL-LIFE ROMANTIC
THRILLER/ESCAPE SAGA IS
ESSENTIAL
STRANGER-THAN-FICTION
VIEWING."**

— JUSTIN CHANG, VARIETY



IN CINEMAS SEPTEMBER 23
AVAILABLE ON DEMAND SEPTEMBER 24



SODAPICTURESUK



SODAPICTURESUK



SODAPICTURES

#THELOVERSANDTHEDESPOTUK

WWW.SODAPICTURES.COM



EDITORIAL

Editor

Nick James

Deputy editor

Kieron Corless

Features editor

James Bell

Web editor

Nick Bradshaw

Production editor

Isabel Stevens

Chief sub-editor

Jamie McLeish

Sub-editors

Robert Hanks

Jane Lamacraft

Researchers

Mar Diestro-Dópidio

Credits supervisor

Patrick Fahy

Credits associates

Kevin Lyons

Pieter Sonke

James Piers Taylor

Design and art direction

chrisbawndesign.com

Origination

Rhapsody

Printer

Wyndeham Group

BUSINESS

Publisher

Rob Winter

Publishing coordinator

Brenda Fernandes

Advertising consultant

Ronnie Hackston

T: 020 7957 8916

M: 07799 605 212

E: ronnie.hackston@bfi.org.uk

Newsstand distribution

Cornag Specialist

T: 01895 433800

Bookshop distribution

Central Books

T: 020 8986 4854

Sight & Sound (ISSN 0037-4806) is published monthly by British Film Institute, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN and distributed in the USA by Mail Right Int., 1637 Stelton Road B2, Piscataway, NJ 08854. Periodicals Postage Paid at Piscataway, NJ and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sight & Sound c/o Mail Right International Inc. 1637 Stelton Road B2, Piscataway NJ 08854.

Subscription office:

For subscription queries and sales of back issues and binders contact:

Subscription Department

Sight & Sound

Abacus e-Media

3rd Floor Chancery Exchange

10 Furnival Street, London, EC4A 1AB

T: 020 8955 7070

F: 020 8421 8244

E: sightandsound@abacusemedia.com

Annual subscription rates:

UK £45, Eire and ROW £68

£10 discount for BFI members



Copyright © BFI, 2016

The views and opinions expressed in the pages of this magazine or on its website are those of the author(s) and are not necessarily those of the BFI or its employees. The contents of this magazine may not be used or reproduced without the written permission of the Publisher.

The BFI is a charity (registration number 287780), registered at 21 Stephen St, London, W1T 1LN



Editorial Nick James



POLL POSITION

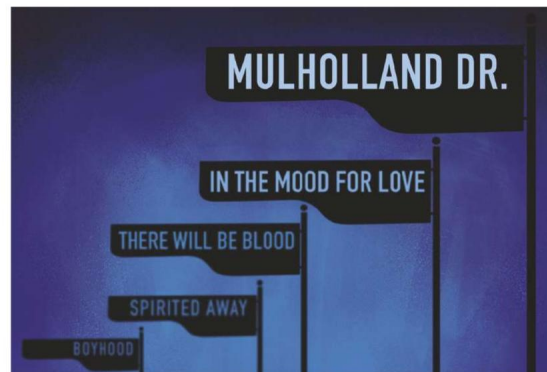
Among the reactions to BBC Culture's recent poll of The Best Films of the 21st Century that might have been expected from *Sight & Sound* are a churlish "Your tanks are on our lawn" or a more cynical "Another day another poll". But we are not so negative (not in this column, oh no). After all, this is the age of the listicle and the list compiled from the choices of the 177 critics the BBC asked – which included me – provided a welcome focus on the cinema preferences of recent times. The poll was constructed in a different manner to our world-famous Greatest Films of All Time poll, which we conduct once every ten years (the next is due in 2022). Our system gives one point to each of the ten films chosen by each of our 800-plus contributors, whereas the BBC went for a weighting system whereby the first choice gets ten points and the tenth, one. (We find that some of the people we want to take part in ours object to having to order their choices).

I don't know if this weighting contributed to the most worrying aspect of the BBC's list – the fact that 16 of the first 25 films, and more than half of the top 100, are English-language productions – but it wouldn't surprise me if it had. Nicholas Barber, in his introduction on the BBC website, bravely calls the list a "phenomenally diverse" selection, but he mostly means aesthetically diverse. Given the anglophone predominance, and (on a quick count) only nine films credited solely to women and five to BAME directors, that claim would otherwise look tentative. Such diversity measurements would, of course, also find our poll wanting, although less so, I would argue, when it comes to the English-speaking bias.

To test this, I've looked at how much of a best films of the 21st century comparative list could be dredged from our 'all time' results. Of course four years have elapsed since our poll, so such strong-showing titles in the BBC list as *Boyhood* (2014, fifth), *Inside Llewyn Davis* (2013, 11th), *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015, 19th) and *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014, 21st) could not have registered.

None the less it is possible to create, from our 2012 top 300, a top 19, which runs as follows 1. *In the Mood for Love*; 2. *Mulholland Dr.*; 3. *Yi Yi (A One and a Two)*; 4. *The Tree of Life*; 5. *Tropical Malady*; 6. *Hidden*; 7. *Werckmeister Harmonies*; 8. *West of the Tracks*; 9. *WALL-E*; 10. *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*; 11. *The Turin Horse*; 12. *There Will Be Blood*; 13. *Spirited Away*; 14. *Russian Ark*; 15. *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu*; 16. *The White Ribbon*; 17. *Blissfully Yours*; 18. *Melancholia*; 19. *Colossal Youth*.

There are only four US titles there, as I suspected, though it might have been different if our poll had focused only on the last 16 years. The most striking thing to note is that the same two films came top (albeit in reverse order). Second in the BBC list and 25th in ours, Wong Kar Wai's *In the Mood for Love* is our highest



This is the age of the listicle and the list compiled from the choices of the 177 critics the BBC asked provided a welcome focus on the cinema preferences of recent times

placed 21st century film; David Lynch's *Mulholland Dr.*, first in the BBC's list, comes next in ours at 28th.

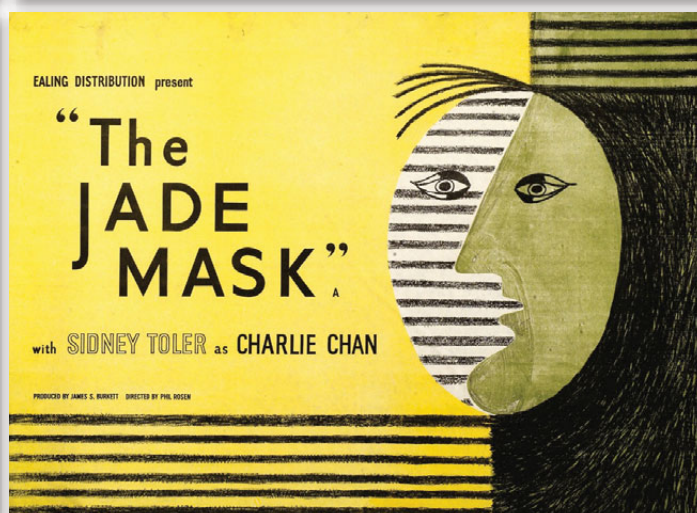
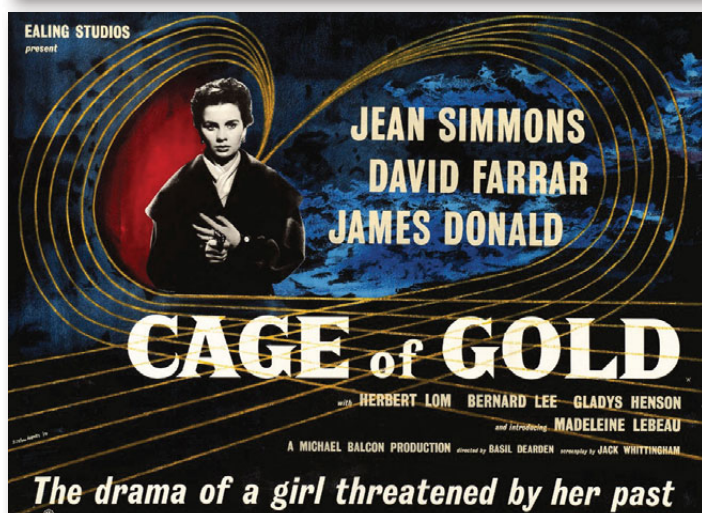
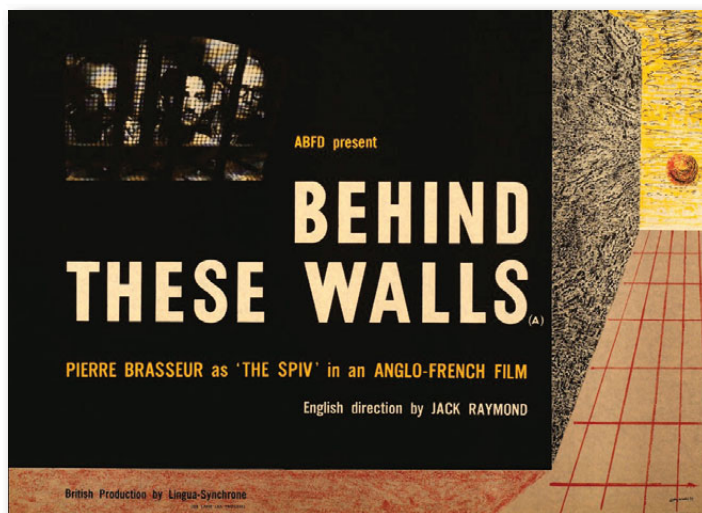
David Sillito of the BBC's *News at Ten*, who had me as his guest on the poll launch day, was keen to question the reputation of Lynch's film, asking "Do you get it?" and "What did you get out of it?" Though *Mulholland Dr.* was not in my own top ten (what was I thinking?), it is wonderful to see such a visually inspired fever dream of a film get top billing.

I'm fonder, though, of my own number one, *In the Mood for Love*, which Sillito pressed me to agree is "The Brief Encounter of our time", although it's more gorgeous than that suggests. In the same week the BBC poll was published, we heard the news that the sales agent Fortissimo Films, which had done so much to bring Asian films to the West, including those of Wong Kar Wai, had quietly gone into administration. The UK-based distributor Metrodome suffered the same fate on the same day. We would like to honour them both here for their brilliant work in bringing the best of world cinema to these and other shores.

Sixteen years in is an interesting moment to consider a new century. If there was a second *fin de siècle*, it is certainly now over. The Tarkovsky-influenced films that seemed to come in a cluster in the 1990s are now rare, and would, I suspect, be harder to distribute these days. One wonders at what point in the 20th century people started to discount the Victorians. The dominant American filmmakers on the BBC list are the Coen brothers, not Spielberg or Scorsese, so something is shifting at last. But let's hope that with the polls we create we're not playing into people's short-term cultural memory. After all, silent cinema has never been as popular in my lifetime as it is right now. **S**

IN THE FRAME

POETRY IN PROMOTION



An exhibition of Ealing film posters reveals that they were just as distinctive and original as the classic films themselves

By Nathalie Morris

In 1943, Michael Balcon, head of Ealing Studios instituted an advertising policy which would see some of the best artists, illustrators and designers of the day create posters and other promotional material for the company's films. Balcon, a keen collector of contemporary British art, firmly believed that high-quality productions deserved posters of equal merit and distinction. To this end, he and studio publicist Monja Danischewsky

hired a young designer, critic and curator, S. John Woods, to take charge of Ealing's advertising. Over the next 12 years, Woods's department created posters that today form as vivid a part of the Ealing legacy as the films themselves.

Woods was himself a talented painter and designer and a champion of modern – particularly abstract – art. Before joining Ealing he had worked in a variety of film and non-film advertising roles and designed publicity material



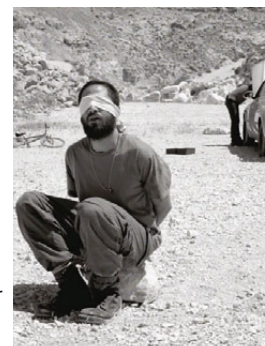
Scalarama

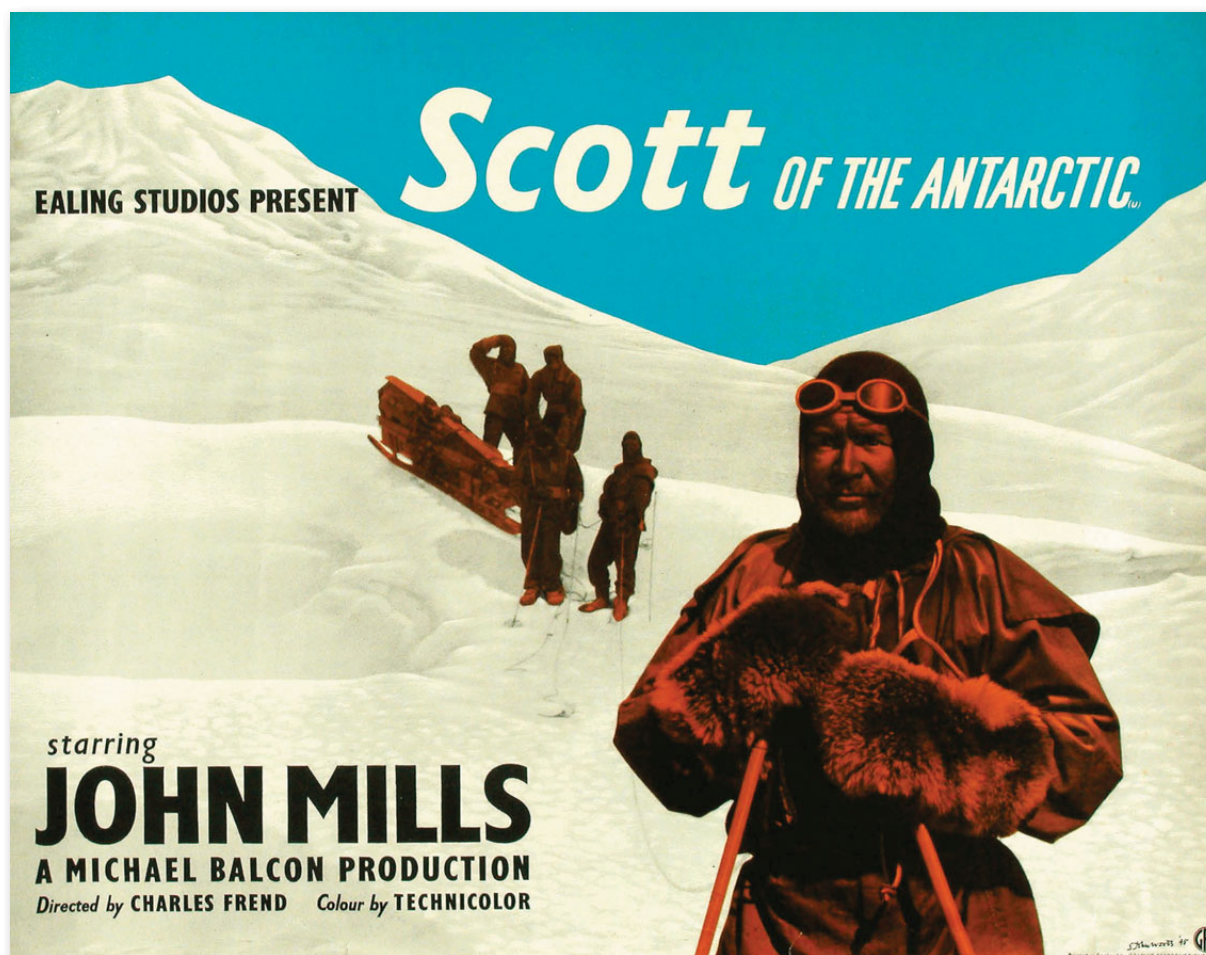
The DIY cinema smorgasbord returns throughout September, with an eclectic mix of films at venues nationwide, from a doc about rep cinema, 'Out of Print', to obscure British supernatural oddity 'Psychomania' (1973, right). This year also sees an initiative in Glasgow that allows you to watch movies in strangers' homes.



Safar

Very few Arab films get a UK theatrical release – hence the importance of an annual showcase of contemporary Arab cinema like Safar, which runs from 14-18 September at ICA, London. Highlights include Muayad Alayan's Godardesque crime caper 'Love, Theft and Other Entanglements' (right).





for organisations including London's left-wing Unity Theatre. In the mid-1930s he had also curated a series of innovative exhibitions trying to broaden the audience for contemporary art by showing work outside traditional gallery settings (venues included the Everyman Cinema in Hampstead and a furniture showroom).

Film posters offered a different approach to the same idea. Although in the 1920s and 30s companies such as Shell had shown that art and advertising could successfully go hand in hand, film posters were not respected as an artform. Woods changed that. Carefully matching artist to film, he commissioned some of the top names of 20th-century British art and design, including Edward Ardizzone, Edward Bawden, James Boswell, Barnett Freedman, Robert Medley, John Minton, John Piper and Ronald Searle.

Woods's working papers have recently been donated by his family to the BFI National Archive and provide fascinating insights into his working methods. While giving each artist creative freedom, Woods remained closely involved throughout the process, guiding and advising on layout, typography and printing technicalities. Piper wrote that Woods "always influenced the final results", ensuring that Ealing had a strong, coherent visual style. This coherence encompassed all of the company's printed material, from promotional brochures and press advertisements through to office stationery. It went beyond Ealing, as well, since Woods's remit also included the related organisations ABFD (Associated British Film Distributors) and Group 3.

The Ealing style was not appreciated by the

studio's distributors, the Rank Organisation. Rank frequently produced alternative, more 'commercial' posters, much to the frustration of Balcon and Woods, who were constantly at loggerheads with their paymasters. But the art, design and advertising worlds viewed things differently. Numerous laudatory articles were published across the 1940s and 50s, and Ealing posters featured in several international exhibitions celebrating modern design. Balcon was gratified and bemused, writing in a 1954 memo to Woods: "If the posters get better known than the films, I shall be jealous." 

 **Highlights from the S. John Woods archive will be on show as part of the exhibition 'Recent Acquisitions to BFI Special Collections', which runs at BFI Southbank, London, from 9 September – 23 October**

Estuary Festival

The Thames estuary is the inspiration and setting for this festival (17 September – 2 October), which has a number of film events. Among the highlights are John Akomfrah's installation 'Mnemosyne', a programme of artists and leftfield documentaries installed in a Southend-on-Sea beach hut, Nikolaj Larsen's Thames essay 'Portrait of a River' (right), and a new film by Jem Cohen observing Southend and Canvey Island.



The Man Who Fell to Earth

David Bowie's humanoid alien beams into UK cinemas from 9 September with a new 4K restoration to mark the 40th anniversary of the cult sci-fi odyssey from Nicolas Roeg (pictured with Bowie, right). The film was Bowie's feature debut, and arguably his most arresting film role. A collector's edition Blu-ray and DVD, which includes many enticing behind-the-scenes extras, will follow on 24 October.



PAPER WEIGHT



In the beginning was the word: the deranged adventures of *The Saragossa Manuscript* begin when the illustrated text in the titular work is read aloud

In the world of film – the world of the image – the manuscript can be a token of irrelevance or a source of meaning



By Hannah McGill

Joachim Trier's *Reprise* (2006) commences with two writers dropping manuscripts into a postbox. Anything could happen; the books may

be written, but their fates are not. A manuscript, on screen as in life, is a thing of wildly unstable value and meaning. It is mere paper and ink until interpreted by a reader, and even then its worth might be measured radically differently by different readers. Its author might love it, but a publisher reject it – or vice versa. And though any value it possesses is theoretically located in its content, it might, if sufficiently rare and prized, gain astronomical worth as a physical object, even while that content can be freely reproduced. Manuscripts can of course hold profound significance in the film world, as the sources of movies, but on screen they frequently represent the fragility of the creative ego and lifestyle.

In both *Wonder Boys* (2000) and *Love Actually* (2003), an incomplete manuscript is presented as a burden on its author – its physical weight emblematic of a convoluted and restricting emotional life, its sacrifice a blessing in disguise. For *Wonder Boys*' Grady Tripp (Michael Douglas),

the loss of the vast, aimless book he's been unable to finish is at once just punishment for infidelities and other misdeeds, and a liberation that permits him to pursue a more honest life, including leaving his wife for his pregnant mistress.

"Oh God, it's half the book," says Jamie (Colin Firth) in *Love Actually* as the wind carries his pages off into a lake; but as housemaid Aurelia (Lúcia Moniz) strips off to dive in after it, his belief in the book and its quality rapidly fades. Whether it's her commitment to saving his work or the flesh she reveals in the process that stirs him (a slow-motion pan over her body rather suggests the latter), infatuation with Aurelia swiftly displaces investment in his pages. "It's not bloody Shakespeare," he protests as she swims after them.

Bloody Shakespeare himself, however, at least as he appears in *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), reverses this depiction of book-writing as unromantic, emasculating drudgery. This

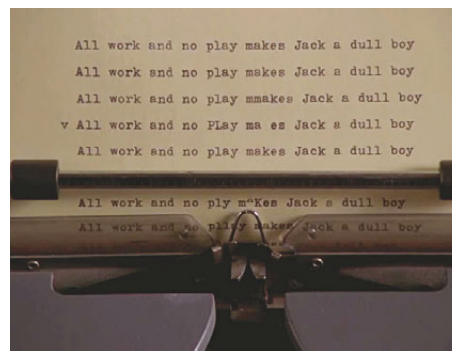
Shakespeare is blocked when romantically disappointed – tossing away manuscript pages when betrayed by a girlfriend – and productive only once in love again. In *Reprise*, the sensitivity needed to be a writer is also vulnerability to madness, and the muse who unlocks creativity can also disable it.

The ideas of words as sacred and woman as muse are both subverted in *Morvern Callar* (2001), in which the title character appropriates her late partner's manuscript, passes it off as her own work, and spends the not inconsiderable advance on travel and partying. A blithely

Who needs the slog of reading words on paper when cinema can spirit you straight into the story?



Joachim Trier's *Reprise* (2006)



The Shining (1980)

philistine embodiment of the precious author's worst fears, Morvern cares only for the book's monetary value – she never even looks at its content. By denying the viewer any knowledge of the words or story in the manuscript, and showing us simply an authorless stack of paper redeemable as a small fortune, *Morvern Callar* emphasises the strangeness of certain combinations of words on paper possessing more meaning and monetary value than others.

The breakdown of that understanding is the source of the unease when Jack Torrance in *The Shining* (1980) is revealed to have typed just the words "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" on every single page of his manuscript – and of the comic misery engendered in *Blackadder the Third* (1987) when the manuscript of Dr Johnson's dictionary is burned by the dim servant Baldrick.

These ambivalent views of manuscripts in film and television might to some extent be read as a younger artform thumbing its nose at its staid progenitor. Who needs the slog of reading words on paper when cinema can spirit you straight into the story? Who needs a manuscript when you could have a script – or novelists when you have *directors*? Elsewhere, however, we find the manuscript as a metaphor for the cinematic experience. The deranged adventures of *The Saragossa Manuscript* (1965) commence when the titular object, a richly illustrated text found by a soldier in a bombed house, is read aloud. The reader-as-filmmaker transforms the words into physical experience.

Perhaps the most poignant manuscript we find in cinema is the opus left behind by the posthumously celebrated 'outsider' artist Henry Darger, celebrated and excerpted in Jessica Yu's 2003 documentary *In the Realms of the Unreal*. Unseen and valueless during his lifetime, Darger's vast fantasy (full title: *The Story of the Vivian Girls, in What Is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinnian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion*) – at more than 15,000 pages "perhaps the world's longest novel", as Yu's film has it – has since his death in 1973 become both expensive and admired. The book, in 15 bound volumes, speaks intimately to its reader, and offers a cinematic experience: "Let the reader... follow every event and adventure in the volume, and then he can if he sets his mind and heart on it take it on as if he himself was an actual participator." But despite the intrigue now attached to Darger, the manuscript itself remains unpublished and barely read – an epic playing out in an empty auditorium. 📖



Wonder Boys (2000)

INTERVIEW

BATHROOM FARCE



Director Rachel Lang (left) and star Salomé Richard

With her first feature, *Baden Baden*, and with her day-job in the French army, director Rachel Lang overturns expectations

By Isabel Stevens

From watching *Baden Baden*, Rachel Lang's debut feature about a young woman who returns home to Strasbourg after flunking her job as a runner on a film set and spends her summer hanging out with her arty friends and feisty grandmother, you might imagine Lang shooting music videos or adverts on the side to fund her passion. In fact, Lang is an officer in the French army, in charge of a unit of 30 men. Being a soldier didn't particularly prepare her for directing she tells me, but after working in such a tough environment, making a film didn't seem so hard.

"I wanted to deal with growing up and becoming an adult," Lang says of the trilogy of films of which *Baden Baden* is the final instalment. All three films focus on Ana (played throughout by Salomé Richard) and her "existential confusion". Lang first sketched out the triptych seven years ago while at film school in Belgium, where she met most of her crew, including DP Fiona Braillon, whose imaginative and colourful compositions are no small part of *Baden Baden*'s charm. In contrast to Lang's first two shorts, her feature is a comedy – a genre she felt allowed her more freedom. It all started with the unusual plot idea of a bathroom renovation: Ana is helping her grandmother, who has broken her hip, to change her bath to a shower. The film follows her comically haphazard DIY experiments and the motley band of helpers she enlists, charting her sparky relationship with her ex Boris and an affair or two along the way.

It is a remarkably refreshing and inventive portrait. She tells me that there weren't any films that directly inspired her, but that *Baden Baden* was partly a reaction to "girls in films being used as objects of desire". "It's a shame, because those girls rarely dominate a film," she says. In *Baden Baden*, Ana is never passive, brazenly demanding men give her their phone numbers and enlisting

people in her project. "I wanted to level the two genders," Lang tells me of her androgynous heroine. "It doesn't matter if you are a boy or a girl, you can inhabit Ana's character. I met a 50-year-old man who told me, 'It's my life.'"

"I didn't want her to be too sexualised," Lang continues, "so she mostly wears the same shorts and T-shirts. There are various physiological things that mark her as a girl – like she's having an abortion. But really she's just a human being. I discovered Salomé after testing over 100 girls for the role. She is naturally very seductive and girly. I asked her to cut all her hair off and that helped her get into the character."

The role of the grandmother wasn't easy to fill either – most older actresses she met had had too much plastic surgery. Lang decided upon the more natural 90-year-old French actor Claude Gensac: she brought a stubbornness to the character which avoided any sentimentality.

Another noteworthy feature of the film is its meandering and unexpected plot: "I didn't want it to be like a script. I wanted it to be like life – some acceleration, some momentary slowness. For example, the rental car from the film production that Ana doesn't return. You are wondering what is going to happen with it. She ends up losing her licence after being caught speeding but the man in the rental car agency is not aware of anything. He just takes the car back. I like that it's not very dramatic. I like playing with the rules."

Lang also folds Ana's dreams into the film: "The oniric sequences were a different way of her having power over things. Ana's boyfriend Boris is an ambitious man, an artist who is recognised by society as doing great things. She is just like a normal person, but I wanted to show the power of her imagination too."

A director to watch, Lang is working on her next film, about the relationship between a soldier in the French Foreign Legion and the wife waiting for him. The Legion interests her for the different nationalities and the mix of people in it. She is, of course, not the first French director to focus on it: "I love Claire Denis's *Beau travail*. But my film will not be too similar." 📖



Baden Baden is released on 23 September and is reviewed on page 58

THE HORROR OF WAR

In *Under the Shadow* Babak Anvari uses his childhood memories of the Iran-Iraq war as the backdrop to a different kind of horror

By Olivia Howe

Following his Bafta-nominated short film *Two & Two*, Iranian-born writer Babak Anvari makes his screenwriting and directorial debut with *Under the Shadow*: a low-budget, Farsi-language horror, which premiered at Sundance this year to universal acclaim.

Set in Tehran in 1988, against the backdrop of the Iran-Iraq war, Anvari's debut is a terrifying allegory of the real-life conflict that marked his youth, imbued with his own childhood memories. The film centres on Shideh (Narges Rashidi), an aspiring doctor determined to resume her medical studies, but unable to do so due to her past political activism. When her husband is drafted off to the war, Shideh is left alone to protect their daughter Dorsa from the supernatural force brought into their building by a missile attack. Bracingly feminist in tone, the film is as much an expressionist exercise in genre as it is a portrait of female oppression.

Olivia Howe: What are the films that inspire your approach to genre filmmaking?

Babak Anvari: I was really inspired by Polanski's early films, like *Repulsion* [1965] and *The Tenant* [1976]. Guillermo del Toro was also a big inspiration because he loves making films in the backdrop of a real event, like the Spanish Civil War. All these films suddenly merged in my head and eventually became *Under the Shadow*.

OH: What was your inspiration behind the script?

BA: The main inspiration came from my childhood memories; I was born in Iran and was more or less the same age as the child in the film when the war ended. It was a time of excitement and nervousness – as a child everything seems exciting. I remember the noise of the sirens and the times when I would run down to the basement, knowing that if you don't go down there, something bad could happen. Thinking about those memories and talking with my parents, particularly my mother, really inspired the script.

The film is a work of fiction, not autobiography, but my father was a young doctor at that time who had to go and serve in the war. That element from my own life, along with the anxieties that my mother had when my father went away, formed a huge part of the story. Other parts are the stories from family friends and relatives about life at that time – obviously heavily dramatised and fictionalised. Whilst our building never got hit by a missile, we had family friends who were. Everyone experienced that time in their own way and has great stories to tell.

OH: In the film, the supernatural horror also acts a metaphor for the war. Did horror feel like the natural choice to depict those troubled times?

BA: Completely. When you look at a lot of horror films, the horror is classically a metaphor for repression. The setting I chose is all about repression, so it made sense to me to go down that route.



Persians of interest: Narges Rashidi as Shideh and Avin Manshadi as her daughter Dorsa

OH: The film has been applauded for being refreshingly feminist. What was important to you when developing the role of Shideh?

BA: I didn't really set out to write a feminist story, it just came naturally. I wanted to tell the tale of a woman stuck in a man's world, who is trying to figure out her place in society. As she does this, things start unravelling – she starts unravelling. The starting point was a conversation with my mother where I realised the character had to be a parent. It wasn't until I sat back and looked at the film that I realised that all the men are in the background.

OH: The parent-child relationship occupies a large section in the history of horror. What attracted you to explore those dynamics?

BA: This probably stems from my fears of

It was a time of excitement and nervousness – as a child everything seems exciting. I remember the noise of the sirens



Babak Anvari on set

becoming a parent, because it is such a huge responsibility. I always find it interesting how everyone has their own philosophy and way of being a parent. There is no one way. Parenthood is a very universal and relatable theme – everyone understands the relationship between a mother and child.

OH: How did you approach working with such a young actress on a horror film?

BA: Avin Manshadi was extremely talented. From day one rehearsing scenes was more like playing – like, "I'll be the big bad wolf, and you be the three little pigs." I did this with her to get her trust; telling her it was a made-up story and that none of it is real. She got it instantly. She had never acted before. She tried to absorb a lot from Narges and after four days on set she was like a professional actress.

OH: As the story evolves, the film breaks away from conventional framing, with the camera rotating 90 degrees or panning out to reveal something previously unseen on screen.

BA: This was an ongoing conversation with my DP Kit Fraser, who I have known since film school. He read almost every draft of the film and when it came to shooting we planned it together, spending nine hours a day on the scenes – planning is really key as a filmmaker. We only had 21 days to shoot the film, but knew what we wanted to achieve. We wanted the film to be very naturalistic at the start, like an Iranian social drama, but as it develops and we get more and more into Shideh's head, things start to shift. The key thing was for the shift to be more expressionist – but I wanted it to happen smoothly. 📍

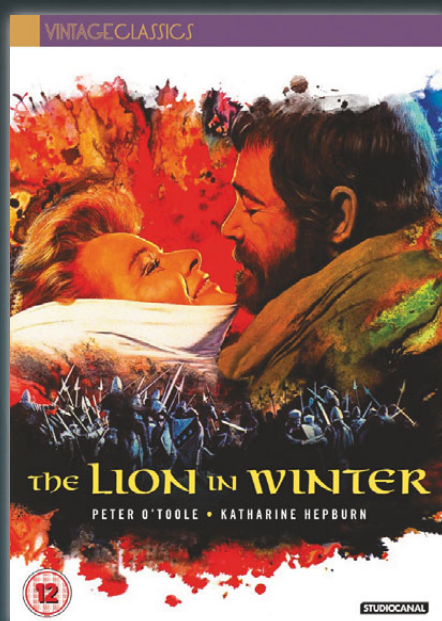
i *Under the Shadow* is released on 30 September and is reviewed on page 92

COMING SOON TO

VINTAGE CLASSICS

VINTAGE CLASSICS is a celebration of iconic British Film History in one stunning collection.

All films have been digitally restored on DVD and Blu-ray featuring brand new bonus material.



THE LION IN WINTER

STUNNING NEW RESTORATION

FEATURES BRAND NEW BONUS MATERIAL

- New interview with John Castle
- New interview with editor John Bloom
- Director's commentary
- O'Toole on Hepburn – 5 min excerpt from TCM interview
- Katharine Hepburn interview
- 25th anniversary interview with Anthony Hopkins

ON BLU-RAY & DVD OCTOBER 3RD

FOLLOW US ON  /VINTAGECLASSICSFILM TO FIND OUT MORE

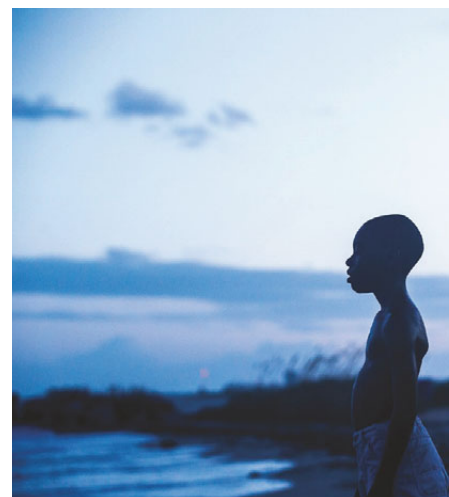
Available at

amazon.co.uk

Free Super Saver Delivery and Unlimited One-Day Delivery with Amazon Prime are available on eligible orders. Terms and Conditions apply. See Amazon.co.uk for details. Amazon, the Amazon logo and Amazon.co.uk are registered trademarks of Amazon EU SARL or its affiliates

STUDIOCANAL

BFI LONDON FILM FESTIVAL

Rosamund Pike and David Oyelowo in Amma Asante's *A United Kingdom*Barry Jenkins's *Moonlight*Mira Nair's *Queen of Katwe*

With a focus on black talent and an *S&S* Gala presenting the film of 2016, this autumn's festival is set to be one of the most exciting in years

Showing at
the London
Film Festival
2016

By Nick James

When I recently visited BFI head of festivals Clare Stewart's office, above the riverside entrance to BFI Southbank, leaning against the wall was a terrifying London Film Festival organisation chart covered with little coloured bits of paper of indeterminate meaning – as complex and colourful as an intricate circuit board. I was there to get information from her about the films those bits of paper represent, and she was keen to offer a few insights about them. What follows is a digest of the best of what I found out. It was written before the press launch.

The most important element is the focus on black talent. In mid-October, the BFI's extraordinary Black Star programme will begin, billed as "the UK's biggest ever season of film and television dedicated to celebrating the range, versatility and power of black actors". The BFI

LFF will lead the way with its own roster of BAME talent. The festival will open with Amma Asante's sumptuous-looking *A United Kingdom*, in which David Oyelowo plays Seretse Khama, the king of Bechuanaland (Botswana today), who in 1947 outraged the British and South African governments – not to mention his own people – by marrying Ruth Williams (Rosamund Pike), a white London office worker. Oyelowo also stars in another LFF European premiere, Mira Nair's *The Queen of Katwe*, based on the true story of Phiona Mutesi (Madina Nalwanga), a young Uganda corn-seller whom Oyelowo's character Robert Katende discovers is a potential chess champion. Lupita Nyong'o plays Phiona's mother, whose support proves crucial to the young girl's progress.

Alongside these upbeat African stories, the LFF is also presenting several important US films, each in its own way relevant to the 'Black Lives Matter' campaign. Ava DuVernay's *The 13th* – named for the 13th Amendment to the US Constitution, which abolished slavery – is a documentary about the high rate of incarceration of African Americans. Actor-director Nate Parker's 1831 slave revolt drama *The Birth of a Nation* is by all accounts a confrontational account of the life of revolt leader Nat Turner (played by Parker) – it won both the Grand Jury Prize and Audience Award at

Sundance. Spike Lee's blistering satire of Chicago gang life *Chi-raq* is showing, as is a restoration of Julie Dash's landmark 1991 film *Daughters of the Dust* – a major influence on Beyoncé's 'visual album' *Lemonade* – which for too long has been hard to see. Another cause for excitement is Barry Jenkins's *Moonlight*. Based on the play *In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue*, a three-ages portrait of a male growing up secretly gay in Miami gang culture, the film is creating a huge buzz. Rounding off the celebration of black talent is indigenous Australian director Ivan Sen's highly regarded *noir* thriller *Goldstone*. The aboriginal detective Jay Swan (Aaron Pedersen), who featured in Sen's *Mystery Road* (2013), has gone to seed after the death of his daughter; his mission this time is to find out what happened to a Chinese woman gone missing from a mining town.

Among the many reasons why *Sight & Sound* is excited about this year's BFI LFF is a selfish one. For the *Sight & Sound* Gala we've bagged what we believe is the film of the year – Maren Ade's *Toni Erdmann*, which won the Fipresci prize at Cannes and left many critics baffled as to why it didn't take home the Palme d'Or. I have not seen a more original film in the last four or five years. We perhaps have a reputation for picking serious, lengthy arthouse sagas for this slot,

but *Toni Erdmann* is a comedy... a comedy from Germany... a German comedy about a practical joker... Yes, it all sounds soooo unpromising. Winfried Conradi (Peter Simonischek), an ageing prankster in mourning for his pet dog, decides to go to Bucharest to bring some chaos back into the life of Ines (Sandra Hüller), his workaholic daughter. How it spins out from there is best kept secret, but it's a *tour de force* of unexpected hilarity.

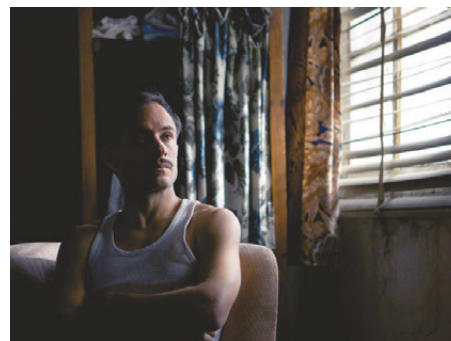
Of the other Cannes favourites, the festival has Jim Jarmusch's exquisite, heartfelt paean to a poetry-writing bus driver, *Paterson*; Cristian Mungiu's complex, convincing drama of parental ambition and moral compromise, *Graduation*; our cover feature film, Andrea Arnold's *American Honey*; Kleber Mendonça Filho's *Aquarius*, a portrait of an indomitable diva, played by Sonia Braga; and Paul Verhoeven's brilliant rape-revenge fantasy thriller *Elle*. There will be others that we've not yet divined, but by the time you read this you can check the programme yourselves.

One film bound to attract controversy is Bertrand Bonello's *Nocturama/Paris Is Happening* (title still to be decided), a tense but elegant study of a multiracial teenage gang intent on planting bombs in Paris, which plays a little as if Jules Dassin's *Rififi* were evolving into George A. Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*. The idea of terrorism being something necessary or desirable for a group of teenagers, some of them sulky bourgeois kids, is bound to stir up debate. Another contemporary theme, immigration, is strongly present in three documentaries: in *The War Show*, directed by Andreas Dalsgaard and Obaidah Zytoon, a Syrian radio DJ shares her experiences of the Arab Spring and its aftermath; Alice Diop's Wisemanesque *On Call (La Permanence)* consists of direct-to-camera interviews with immigrants, carried out in a doctor's waiting room in a Parisian suburb; and Eva Omer's *Chasing Asylum* is an intense exposé of Australia's policy towards asylum seekers.

In this year's Competition you'll find a number of name auteurs: alongside Verhoeven is Terence Davies, with his Emily Dickinson tribute *A Quiet Passion*; Pablo Larraín, with his highly rated anti-biopic *Neruda*, which avoids the clichés of tracing a major poet's life; François Ozon, with *Frantz*, his monochrome post-World War I study of grief and unknowingly shared passions; and Kelly Reichardt, with *Certain Women*, a triptych of female character studies set in Montana and adapted from Maile Meloy's short stories 'Tome', 'Native Sandstone' and 'Travis, B.' There are also works by lesser-known film directors: Mijke de Jong's *Layla M* portrays a very smart 18-year-old Dutch-Moroccan girl's radicalisation; Australian theatre director Benedict Andrews's film debut *Una* – based on David Harrower's play *Blackbird* – stars Rooney Mara as a woman in her twenties who tracks down middle-aged Ray (Ben Mendelsohn), who had engaged her in a sexually abusive relationship when she was a child. *Moonlight*, mentioned above, is also in Competition, along with *Your Name* – Shinkai Makoto's anime tale about an urban boy and a rural girl who dream they are each other, with consequences both fabulous and alarming – and Martin Koolhoven's western *Brimstone*, starring Guy Pearce as a terrifying



Isabelle Huppert in Paul Verhoeven's *Elle*



Pablo Larraín's *Neruda*



Sandra Hüller and Peter Simonischek as daughter and father in Maren Ade's *Toni Erdmann*

preacher, which Clare Stewart describes as "Cormac McCarthy meets *Night of the Hunter*".

Among the British delights, apart from *American Honey*, *A Quiet Passion* and *Una*, there's Lone Scherfig's screwball or romantic comedy (we'll see which) *Their Finest*, in which Gemma Arterton and Bill Nighy are making morale-boosting films during WWII. Theatre director Will Oldroyd's *Lady Macbeth* is an adaptation of Nikolai Leskov's Russian rural tragedy *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* – best known through Shostakovich's famously banned opera – reset in 19th century Northumberland. Another rural tale, *The Levelling* – Hope Dickson Leach's feature debut – concerns a young woman's return to the farm she grew up on, where a flood has ruined her family home and her brother has committed suicide; Ellie Kendrick stars. Pete Travis's crime thriller *The City of Tiny Lights*, adapted by Patrick Neate from his own novel, features Riz Ahmed as a detective asked to pursue a missing girl case that then becomes personal. Another detective tale, Sean Foley's *Mindhorn*, has a protagonist with an optical lie-detector in place of a missing eye.

One development Stewart pointed out to me was a tranche of Irish genre films: Darren Thornton's *A Date for Mad Mary*, well received at Karlovy Vary in July, has been described as

a "rite of passage dramedy" and a "charmer"; Liam Gavin's *A Dark Song* is a horror about a young woman who hires an occultist; Billy O'Brien's *I Am Not a Serial Killer* focuses on the good-natured son of a mortician, whose understanding of sociopathic urges puts him on the trail of a Midwestern serial killer; and Lorcan Finnegan's *Without Name* follows a troubled land surveyor who becomes fascinated by some unnamed woodland and the silhouette he sees slipping through the trees.

I've not been so excited by an LFF programme for years – I'm going to have to devote even more time than usual to catching the things I haven't seen yet. And there are other intriguing threads – starting with two David Lynch-related films: in *Blue Velvet Revisited* Peter Braatz assembles material he shot on set 30 years ago, when the director invited his young German fan to document the making of the film; and *David Lynch: The Art Life* is the third part of David Nguyen's trilogy, compiled from 20-odd conversations with Lynch. It's mainly about his painting; none the less, I'm sure I'll see many of you at the screening. 

 **The BFI London Film Festival runs from 5-16 October. Follow S&S online for rolling LFF recommendations and reviews**



OFFICIAL SELECTION
UN CERTAIN REGARD
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

"a pungent tale of infidelity
and (possible) murder"

THE GUARDIAN

"It's the kind of big movie kiss
that sends noir heroes to their knees
and maybe their graves"

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Paulo Branco presents

The Blue Room

a film by Mathieu Amalric

based on the novel by Georges Simenon

In Cinemas & On MUBI
September

film(s) arte CANAL+ CINE+ COCINE

MUBI



TARANTULA, CHEVALEUXTROIS & JOUR2FÊTE PRESENT

SALOMÉ
RICHARD

CLAUDE
GENSAC

SWANN
ARLAUD

ZABOU
BREITMAN

BADEN BADEN

A FILM BY RACHEL LANG

"Baden Baden really shines"

INDIEWIRE

"a confident, witty debut"

SCREEN INTERNATIONAL

COMING SOON
IN CINEMAS & ON MUBI

film(s) arte CANAL+ CINE+ COCINE

MUBI

A STUDY IN SCARLETT

With her languorous grace and cool reserve, Scarlett Johansson is a screen goddess at one remove from the Hollywood mainstream



By Mark Cousins

I'd like to write about Scarlett Johansson. I go to see almost everything she's in, like people followed their favourite movie stars

in the 1940s. She has many such followers – her films have grossed more than \$3 billion in the US alone, making her, before adjustments, the biggest ever female movie star at the box office outside India. Such ubiquity can be boring, but she isn't boring. Though she's clearly not averse to the currents of Hollywood's mainstream – she's plunged into the Marvel Cinematic Universe five times to play Natasha Romanoff – she doesn't fit into it like a hand into a glove.

Why not? Because there are echoes of film history in her screen persona, and there's a note of reservation. The history stuff first. Her lips are the most distinctive I can think of in film since Clara Bow's, though Tom Hardy's come close. A protruding lower one, like Brigitte Bardot's, can seem petulant, but it's Johansson's top lip that asserts, Nordic style. There's beauty in this, and braininess too: Bergman more than baby lips.

I told my boss on this magazine that Johansson reminds me of Carole Lombard and Gary Cooper. Lombard because of that golden, burnished thing – the glowing, the gloaming. And because of eyebrows. Both Lombard's and Johansson's left is often higher than their right, as if to say, "Really?" And then there's the way each stands. Though both are 5'3", they stand tall, shoulders wide. Solid and unskippy. It's just possible to imagine Lombard playing Johansson's part in *Lost in Translation* (2003): the centre of the gaze but refusing to be drunk in, as verbally able as Bill Murray, off-hand about adoration and aware that it's a chimera.

It's this solidity that brings in Cooper. Even in her small part in the Coen brothers' *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001), in the trailer for which Johansson wasn't billed because she wasn't yet a star, she's Cooper-slow. Lombard fizzed but already, in her late teens, on film Johansson oozed. Soon she was like Cooper in Von Sternberg's *Morocco* (1930) – slightly behind the beat, in no rush to get her point made and not fretting about being heard at all. What she and Von Sternberg could have done together. He'd have slowed her down even more. As orphaned martial artist and spy 'Black Widow' Natasha in *Iron Man 2* (2010), *The Avengers* (2012), *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015) and this year's *Captain America: Civil War*, Johansson was – like Marilyn Monroe – sadder than the scenes in which she appeared, and this, along with her slowness, became her signature. Together they showed her reservation, her slowness to anger. Her blackness in these five films was *noirish* and *femme fatale-y*.

Saying this brings to mind her role in Brian



We wanted to be with her, to walk into the dark with her, to have her skin, to have lips like her and hips like her

De Palma's *The Black Dahlia* (2005). In that she was *noirish* too, with more than a hint of Lana Turner, another film history tone. Johansson loves American film (her mum was a movie buff) and she showed that in De Palma's film, which, like all his work, was haunted by other movies.

One thing about slowness and reservation is that it isn't neurotic. There's little crumbling or Method in Johansson. Her voice emphasises this. In Spike Jonze's *Her* (2013), she plays a stormless computer operating system in voice only. When she sings Tom Waits songs on her first studio album *Anywhere I Lay My Head* (2008), her lower register is to the fore. Christopher Nolan, who directed her in *The Prestige* (2006), says she is guarded, and you feel that if you don't say "cut" she could hold her look in a scene for ages and outstare anyone. Woody Allen has returned that stare in three films – *Match Point* (2005), *Scoop* (2006) and *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (2008). In each, his sepia detachment deserted him and he photographed her as if she was the sun. He liked her glowing so much that the films warped around it.

Then came Jonathan Glazer. His much-discussed *Under the Skin* (2013) did the impossible, in that it seems to have the honesty and directness of Abbas Kiarostami's driving films and yet was wildly expressionist. Johansson finally had her Von Sternberg. The blackness and ooze was no longer just a tone: in *Under the Skin* it was a physical place, a vast pool of oil, across which Johansson walked. It was the greatest walk in the movies since Monroe's jello on springs in *Some Like It Hot* (1959). The men in the film followed her and, desirous and priapic, became creatures in the black lagoon. She was a siren now, leading them and us into the underworld. We wanted to be with her, to walk into the dark with her, to have her skin, to have lips like her and hips like her.

These oil-sex scenes were outrageous and yet define Johansson's stardom and – at a push – all movie stardom. Off screen, her friends say that she is unreserved, but it's the opposite of that, a kind of languor, which has made me a follower. An advantage of being reserved is that you're never so high on the moment that you're blind to how things are changing in your career and in film in general. Johansson won't have to come down from the giddy heights of screen goddessness, because she's always stood slightly apart from them. The slowness and sadness are signs that she's pacing herself, which is very good news indeed. ☺

DEVELOPMENT TALE

THE GIRL WITH ALL THE GIFTS



We don't need no education: the zombie classroom in *The Girl with All the Gifts*

Mike Carey's short story sprouted simultaneously into a successful novel and a smart genre movie – with a little help from Joss Whedon

By Charles Gant

Prior to *The Girl with All the Gifts*, the new British genre film starring Glenn Close, Gemma Arterton and Paddy Considine, Mike Carey had plenty of reason to be discouraged by his adventures in the screenwriting trade. The Liverpool-born author had enjoyed a long career writing comic-books and novels, hitting his commercial stride in 1999 with DC Comics/Vertigo's *The Sandman Presents: Lucifer* and again from 2007 with the Felix Castor novel series. But his film and television credits largely consist of a 2002 French animated version of *Tristan & Isolde* ("On the IMDb, someone once described it as the worst movie ever made," he recalls) and an animated series, funded by Fifa, featuring as main characters the cartoon mascots of the 2002 World Cup hosted by Japan and South Korea. ("It was surreal. It was basically a sci-fi series about a football tournament, and there were various things like space-time vortices on the pitch.") Other projects had languished in development limbo.

Carey, however, persisted. When he went for a meeting three-and-a-half years ago with independent producer Camille Gatin (TV's *Endeavour*) he was already several drafts into

a vampire movie called *Silent War* for director Bharat Nalluri (*Spooks*). Gatin, at the time, was looking for a writer to work on a project about Lewis Carroll. Neither of these films has yet to see the light of day, but the meeting did spark a creative partnership. Carey had just completed a short story, 'Iphigenia in Aulis', for an anthology of dark tales on the theme of 'school days' (*An Apple for the Creature*, edited by Charlaïne Harris and Toni Kelner, 2012). He asked Gatin if she would care to look at it.

"One day I just woke up with an image of Melanie in my mind," Carey says, "a 12-year-old girl sitting in the schoolroom writing an essay on the theme of 'What I want to be when I grow up', the hoary perennial that we all write several times in our school careers. But growing up is not an option for her because she's a zombie or something like a zombie. That was the germ of the story. I wrote it in four days."

Gatin immediately saw the story's potential as a film, and spoke to Colm McCarthy, a prolific TV director whose admired small-screen credits (*Peaky Blinders*, *Sherlock*) have rather overshadowed his sole produced feature film (*Outcast*, 2010). Gatin and McCarthy had attempted to make a film about Aleister Crowley five years previously – "We were both a bit junior to get that off the ground, but we really got each other's taste" – and knew that the story's post-apocalyptic setting would strike a chord. "At the time Colm was prepping a TV series, and looking at old factories to use as a production office. And randomly he mentioned

how much he loved visually how all of these old buildings are overtaken by nature and it would be so cool to find a project where you can do that."

Carey, McCarthy and Gatin collaborated on a full feature-film treatment, which at the time bore the title *She Who Brings Gifts*, developing the relationship between Melanie and several human characters – a schoolteacher, a scientist and three soldiers – who are thrown together on a road journey after their base is attacked. The BFI Film Fund quickly boarded to provide development money, Carey was commissioned to deliver his drafts, while McCarthy and Gatin spent the next year focusing on their TV work. Angus Lamont ('71) later boarded to help beef up the producer team. Carey, meanwhile, decided that he would develop his story as both a film and a novel – although there would be narrative differences.

"The story was taking shape in my head," the writer says, "but in two forms. There was a sense in which each process illuminated the other. They did in some significant ways move apart, although they both led to the same conclusion."

In early drafts of the film treatment, Carey had included a second group of humans, called junkers. "The junkers are basically refuseniks," he

When you start thinking in terms of a fungal infestation, your mind fills with imagery – key scenes started to pop into our heads

explains. “They’re survivalists who refuse to go into the human enclave. They prefer to live out in the wild and live among the hungries, live on what they can take.” Although these characters remain in the novel, the writer accepted that they had no place in the film. “The crucial thing was the iconography. It was just the feeling that, if we included them in the mix, they would visually recall post-apocalyptic narratives like *Mad Max* very strongly. It would skew audiences’ perceptions of the story we were telling.”

Furthermore, Gatin adds, “emotionally, for me, it doesn’t work because if humans can’t even agree on how to survive zombies, they deserve to die. And it makes it really complicated, and you have to explain the whole backstory of the junkers, and they’re not really part of the story.”

In the early running, Carey was challenged by his collaborators to flesh out the science of the film’s universe, and he took inspiration from David Attenborough’s *The Secret Life of Plants*, in which a fungus – *Ophiocordyceps unilateralis* – drops spores on to the forest floor and these then attach themselves to the bodies of ants, devouring them. “They immediately really liked that as our macguffin, our disease vector. And it brought a lot of good things with it, because when you start thinking in terms of a fungal infestation, your mind fills with imagery. Certainly some of the key scenes – like the Telecom tower covered in fungal mycelia – started to pop into our heads.”

With the narrative developing far beyond the contours of the original 12-page short story, it became clear that the original informing myth – the sacrifice of Iphigenia, taken from *The Iliad* – no longer suited. Carey turned instead to Pandora and her box of horrors, for reasons that will become clear to the film’s audience. He explains: “The crucial thing in all the versions is that a child, who has so little experience of the world, has to use the stories that she’s given to understand her place in it. We had total freedom for what Melanie would latch on to, which myths would colour her perception.”

In one regard – the film’s title – the journey ended up looping back to the beginning, Carey says. “*The Girl with All the Gifts* was my favoured and original version of the film’s title. If I remember correctly, it was Camille who came up with *She Who Brings Gifts*. I think she was consciously steering away from the many, many narratives that start with ‘The Girl’. She also felt that *She Who Brings Gifts* was more pithy. I always liked *The Girl with All the Gifts* because of the alliteration and because it preserves an ambiguity: it doesn’t allow you to necessarily determine whether those gifts are wonderful attributes that she has, or wonderful gifts that she’s bringing to you.”

The book was published as *The Girl with All the Gifts* in January 2014; shortly afterward, Joss Whedon tweeted his enthusiasm for it, which settled the debate over the film title. “Suddenly the book took off,” Gatin says. “That made my job a lot easier when I approached financiers – ‘Hey, look, Joss Whedon thinks this is amazing, check it out.’”

i *The Girl with All the Gifts* is released in UK cinemas on 23 September and is reviewed on page 60

THE NUMBERS SUMMER BOX OFFICE

By Charles Gant

When it comes to the scheduling of blockbuster film releases, conventional industry wisdom – which crowded the most commercially appealing films into early summer and the Christmas season – has increasingly been challenged. “The summer is a critical period, but it’s much more of a 52-week business now than it ever was before,” Kieran Breen, president of international marketing at Fox, recently commented in *Screen International*. And three of this year’s biggest films so far – *Deadpool*, *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* and *The Jungle Book* – arrived in February, March and April.

For the indie sector, though, where the key release period has long been identified as autumn, winter and the awards corridor leading up to the Oscars ceremony, no similar change seems to be occurring. Summer remains a relatively quiet period, with indie cinemas turning to blockbusters, family films and archive titles to plug the gaps.

Still, recent years have delivered the occasional summer indie hit – notably Richard Linklater’s *Boyhood* (£3.2 million) in July 2014 and Asif Kapadia’s *Amy* (£3.8 million) last July. This year, pickings for indie exhibitors have been notably slender, unless you count Shane Black’s *The Nice Guys* or British family film *Swallows and Amazons* – hardly comparable titles.

Notable disappointments: Matteo Garrone’s English-language *Tale of Tales* (£394,000) failed to match his 2008 Italian-language breakthrough *Gomorrah* (£945,000). Nicolas Winding Refn’s *The Neon Demon* (£386,000) fell way short of his previous *Only God Forgives* (£1.26 million). *Elvis & Nixon*, released on more than 100 screens by major player eOne, maxed out at £149,000.

Then there has been a steady trickle of smaller films that resolutely failed to break out of their niche, from BFI London Film Festival Best Film winner *Chevalier* (£67,000) to Thomas Vinterberg’s *The Commune*



On the money: *Maggie's Plan*

(£89,000), Omer Fast’s *Remainder* (£32,000) and Guillaume Nicloux’s *Valley of Love* (£49,000). Films blatantly targeting the softer end of arthouse – such as Jean Dujardin romcom *Up for Love* (£36,000) and French romantic drama *Summertime* (£45,000) – similarly failed to seduce. *Embrace of the Serpent* (£261,000) was a rare exception, and was kept on for weeks on end at many venues for that reason.

Meanwhile, mainstream films provided plenty of alibis to indie cinema bookers desperate for some bums on seats, be it director talent such as Paul Greengrass (*Jason Bourne*), David Ayer (*Suicide Squad*) and Steven Spielberg (*The BFG*), or brand-name cachet such as Pixar’s *Finding Dory*.

According to Tom Linay, head of film for Digital Cinema Media, “There have been some good films out, but apart from [Whit Stillman’s] *Love & Friendship*, back in May, they haven’t done great business. That’s an issue. I think a distributor needs to take a punt and put a decent arthouse title into this period. A few months back, we had [Damien Chazelle’s] *La La Land* scheduled for July, and we were quite excited about that. Then word got out that it was good, and opening Venice, and it moved back to December in the US and January over here. July was the same release date that *Boyhood* had two years ago, and nothing really filled that gap.”

INDIE MOVIES AT UK SUMMER 2016 BOX OFFICE

Film	Release date	Gross
Maggie’s Plan	8 July	£453,659
Tale of Tales	17 June	£394,299
The Neon Demon	8 July	£385,926
When Marnie Was There	10 June	£308,063
Embrace of the Serpent	10 June	£260,681
Wiener-Dog	12 August	£218,232
Learning to Drive	10 June	£183,619
Race	3 June	£173,844
Where to Invade Next	10 June	£161,857
Elvis & Nixon	24 June	£148,757

June, July and August releases. Grosses to 21 August



PHOTOGRAPHY BY: ANTOINETTE DUYEN/CONTOUR BY GETTY IMAGES

TOUGH ACT TO FOLLOW
Throughout her career, director Andrea Arnold (left) has shown a facility for drawing acute, emotionally vivid performances from the non-professional actors she often works with, and Sasha Lane in *American Honey* (right) is no exception

WANDERING STAR

After a trio of distinctly British features, Andrea Arnold's 'American Honey' takes a road trip into the poverty-stricken hinterlands of the US Midwest, following the hard-partying adventures of a young woman who joins a crew of door-to-door magazine subscription sellers

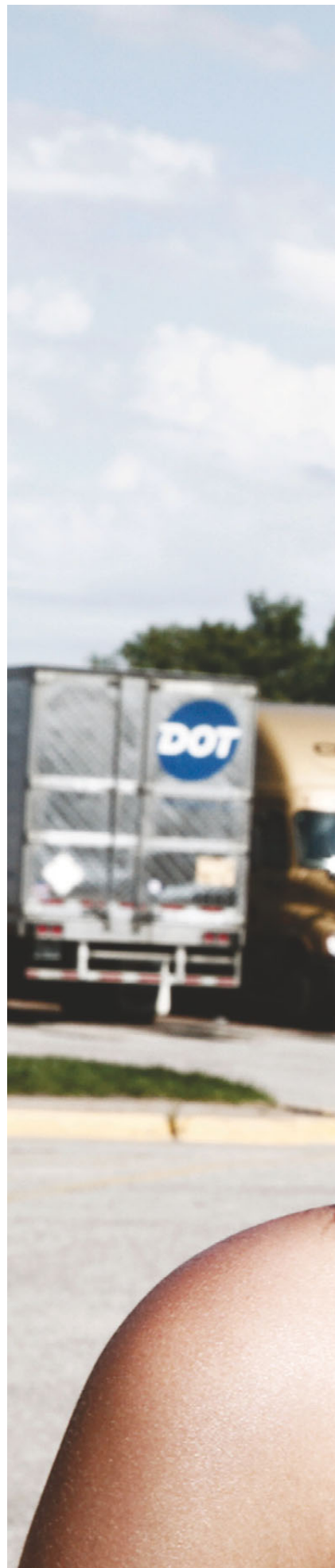
By Simran Hans

There is an early scene in Emma Cline's 2016 novel *The Girls* that sees a grubby-looking gang of teenage girls dive into a dumpster and retrieve a plastic-wrapped chicken that has "a grotesque, foetal quality". In the opening scene of Andrea Arnold's new film *American Honey*, teenage runaway Star (Sasha Lane) also salvages a shrink-wrapped chicken, the viscera of trash squelching audibly beneath her feet. A small boy later attacks the placenta-like plastic sack, stabbing at the chicken's bloody bag with a fork. Though Cline's novel and Arnold's film explore different periods, they share a fascination with the American poor and the found families that are forged outside the structures of traditional society. These are two takes on the no man's land at the fringes of American life, stuck together with sex and sweat and dirt.

From the concrete council estates in *Wasp* (2003), *Red Road* (2006) and *Fish Tank* (2009) to the rolling Yorkshire moors of *Wuthering Heights* (2010), Arnold's filmography is distinctly British. *American Honey* traverses decidedly different geographical terrain, playing out as a cross-country road trip across the poorest pock-

ets of the United States. The plot is loose: during a trip to Walmart, with two young children trailing alongside her, 18-year-old Star locks eyes with boyish, rat-tailed ruffian Jake (Shia LaBeouf). He offers her a job with his 'mag crew', promising that peddling magazine subscriptions door to door by day means partying in motel car parks by night. So she dumps her charges with their mother and hops into Jake's truck, ready for an adventure. Circling themes of existential isolation, social mobility and the powerful pull of sex, it doesn't stray too far from the themes that have always interested Arnold. In scale, however, *American Honey* is an entirely different beast. It is the director's take on the American epic; a long, hot car journey with the music blaring and the windows rolled down.

When I meet Arnold to discuss *American Honey*, it's a sunny August afternoon in central London. I'm her first interviewer of the day, and of this press tour – she admits sheepishly that she's "not done this in a while". In the plush hotel room there are two armchairs and a loveseat, but Arnold chooses to perch on the





◀ windowsill, inviting me to sit beside her. It's an intimate, levelling gesture that hints at one of the reasons for her seemingly magical ability to coax piercingly precise performances from the non-professional actors she often works with. From the jaded belligerence of Katie Jarvis's Mia in *Fish Tank* to Solomon Glave's wrenching, wordless turn as the young Heathcliff in her wind-burned adaptation of *Wuthering Heights*, Arnold has a gift for teasing out emotion on screen. In *American Honey*, she coaxes a striking performance from newcomer Sasha Lane as the tough, flirtatious Star, whose mix of vulnerability and spikiness feels genuinely lived in.

Lane was a late addition to the cast – Arnold recalls noticing her on a beach in Panama during spring break, just two weeks before production. “I remember seeing her – I’m not allowed to tell you what she was doing when I saw her – and then she walked off. She stood out.”

Arnold describes Lane as “careful but open” on first meeting – and justifiably so. “The thing about spring break is that there’s an awful lot of people preying on the girls down there,” she explains. “There’s a lot of people with cameras wanting girls for porn films and things, so they’re pretty suspicious of you when you go up to them.” The character Lane plays is similarly careful but open, with a steely intelligence underlining her seemingly reckless decisions. “Yeah, there’s a lot of her getting in cars with men, wasn’t there?” Arnold says, laughing. “I didn’t even know I was doing that. I didn’t even realise.”

One scene in *American Honey* sees Star jump in a car with a group of older men, who invite her back to their luxurious villa for some mezcal. In Arnold’s films, danger is relative, given the nothing-to-lose situations her characters often find themselves in – and strangers are never quite who they seem to be. Whereas a lorry driver offers fatherly tenderness, a handsome oilfield worker is less trustworthy; Arnold continually rouses the viewer’s curiosity and challenges their comfort threshold with Star’s seedy encounters, though the ball always remains in her female lead’s court. One wonders if the universe is protecting Star, or if she is simply capable of handling herself. Either way, Arnold dares the viewer to trust Star’s instincts, even when the laws of logic advise the opposite.

For the character of Star, it was important for Arnold to cast somebody who could carry the film without the baggage of extreme privilege and wealth. “You have to be incredibly rich to go to college in America, for the most part, so a lot of the teenagers on the beach were not from the sort of demographic I was looking for,” she explains.

With their attention to sometimes sordid detail, Arnold’s gritty depictions of contemporary working-class lives have earned comparisons with the youth films of Larry Clark and Harmony Korine. Of Korine’s filmography, *Spring Breakers* (2012), his neon tableau of hedonistic teenagers and their pilgrimage to the Dirty South, is perhaps *American Honey*’s closest cousin. However, while *Spring Breakers* plunged its middle-class college kids into an underworld of decadence and corrupt cash, watching with complicity as they performed salacious fantasies, *American Honey* searches for something more authentic. Arnold’s ragtag mag crew drinks, smokes, dances and fucks, but not because anyone is watching. Her teenagers simply do as teenagers do.

Inspired by a true story she read in the *New York Times*, she describes being struck by their world and “the idea

that these kids coming from these fairly difficult backgrounds made their own families, and found their own way of living their lives”. Yet, like all of Arnold’s female characters, Star is too much of a loner to ever fold comfortably into her new family. She tries on the mag crew identity, but Arnold never gives the sense that it’s a cosy fit. When I point out that none of her female characters seem to have same-sex companions, she’s adamant that the loneliness of being a woman sans sisterhood is not something she tried to actively explore. “Every time I make a film I don’t think like that. That’s maybe your interpretation, but I don’t think that’s a general thing that I’m trying to get at. If it is, it’s an unconscious one that you’ve picked up on that I’m not aware of.”

Arnold has a reputation for being a thorny interviewee. Over the course of our conversation she spends a lot of time explaining that when she is directing she doesn’t think so much as feel, relying on her instincts and sinking into the journey of the filmmaking. Each time I try to chip away at her intentions, she insists that whatever I have observed was not deliberate. “I never decide ahead of the time – whatever you’re telling me is something that’s emerged from my journey on the film. People always ask me, ‘When you set off, do you have themes?’ And I’m like, ‘No.’”

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

Though in person Arnold is warm and congenial, she is often enigmatic – and incredibly guarded. “Each film is kind of where my psyche is at the time, and often through each film I’m trying to work something out that I don’t fully understand,” she tells me, but snaps shut when I press her on what she was trying to figure out while making *American Honey*. “I kind of know the answer to that but it’s so personal that I don’t know that I can actually say it,” she says, going on to tell me that a friend of hers described it to her as “so full of you and what you’ve been going through in these last years”. Arnold acknowledges the truth of this observation, adding, “You think by setting something in America, by setting something with completely different people at a completely different age in a place you’ve never been to before, you’re sort of removing yourself, but you’re not really.”

Her decision to set the film in America is a curious one, even if *American Honey*’s working-class world isn’t exactly a million miles from the tower blocks in *Red Road* or *Fish Tank*. Some of it is incredibly bleak – like a strung-out mother lying supine on an old sofa in a rundown house. Arnold describes the poverty she witnessed in America as more intense than anything she’s seen in the UK. “Some of the crew on our film, they’d not been to the dentist. Some were really suffering from toothache and they’d just gotten used to it, because they couldn’t afford to go to the dentist. That seemed awful to me,” she says.

It is not just *American Honey*’s exploration of class that is a continuation of the things that mark Arnold as an auteur. Her insect fascination dates back to *Wasp*, so it should be no surprise that *American Honey* also attracts flies: moths swarm a buzzing neon beam, a butterfly scales a linen curtain, a wasp is trapped beneath a glass, a fat bumblebee floats in a swimming pool, a cricket rests on Star’s shoulder. It is also Arnold’s third consecutive film to be shot in the Academy ratio (*Red Road*, which



24-HOUR PARTY PEOPLE *American Honey* (above) is a distant cousin of *Spring Breakers* (2012), but Andrea Arnold’s crew of magazine sellers have an authenticity lacking in Harmony Korine’s salacious neon fantasy of teens running wild in Florida



was made under specific rules devised by Sigma Films and Zentropa for a proposed trilogy of films about the same set of characters, is the exception). Working with her regular cinematographer Robbie Ryan, Arnold crops the Midwestern landscapes, framing sunset-hued vistas as Instagram squares. She recalls visiting London's Tate Modern art gallery with Ryan when they were first discussing *Fish Tank*, and being struck by a collection of 4:3 Polaroids. "I remember both of us looking at them – I think that's the moment when we thought, that's interesting," she says. "The reason I really like it is because I'm always telling stories about one person, and it's the perfect frame for that. It puts them very nicely in the frame when you're following them around and looking at them, and it doesn't give a lot of space on either side. A lot of the 16:9 or the wider frames, that's great for having a two-shot or your big wides and things, but for one person they'd be a little lost in there. Maybe I'm looking after the person a little bit by getting rid of some of the surroundings. I'm trying to home in on the person."

Her radical embrace of Academy ratio is never more perfect for inhabiting one person's perspective than in *American Honey*'s three sex scenes, which put Star squarely in the centre of the frame. The tightness of the framing and the deftness of the editing make for some of the most truthful, intimate and, importantly, erotic depictions of female sexuality that I've seen on screen in a long time, all the while eschewing voyeurism. I ask Arnold if we can talk about the film's love scenes. "It's part of being human, isn't it?" she says. "It's an important part of life. Whenever I'm thinking about a character, I don't like to leave [it out]. I don't like to not think about sex. It's a part of everything we do." She refuses to indulge me further, stating that she doesn't like talking about sex in her films. "It's private to them. Perhaps like it is in real life, I view it that way. It's kind of personal."

The film's music is also kind of personal, she says. When Jake catches Star's eye across a Walmart check-out counter, it's Rihanna's Calvin Harris collaboration 'We Found Love' that blares out. A fizzing

Each film is kind of where my psyche is at the time, and often through each film I'm trying to work something out that I don't fully understand





Even the grimmest and most Spartan of locales are given a jewel-like sheen, highlighting the genuine joy that shines through all of Arnold's films about young people

➡ electronic dance track released five years ago, it's a bizarrely literal choice that dates the film. But Arnold tells me that the song, which was being played on the radio a lot while she was drafting the film, is "reminiscent of a very certain time in life, when I started writing" and was "very much part of my beginning of that journey". The rest of the soundtrack – a selection of trap, Southern hip-hop and country – came from the crew. "Chris [Wright] who plays Riley in the film, suggested Kevin Gates and I just love that song ['Out the Mud'], and I love Kevin Gates now," she says, chuckling. "Choices" by E-40, they were always playing that. It became part of our journey, that song. We were always partying in car parks all the way along. When we weren't filming, we were doing that. We'd take over motels and have car park parties, basically, almost every Friday night, wherever we were. Some of those songs became part of the fabric of what we were doing, and they just felt very truthful to then."

While *American Honey*'s soundtrack sets the film firmly in the present day, the characters remain largely detached from modern technology. This creates a sense of timelessness, putting the characters face to face with one another without the constant buffer of screens or telephones. Arnold spent around two years road-tripping (alone and with a real-life mag crew) across America and observed this reality firsthand. "A lot of them didn't have phones, even. I think now that would probably be unlikely, and they had really, the lowest rent phones, not smartphones, so they were not actually that hooked up to technology. And that struck me because we're all completely hooked up, aren't we?"

The relative lack of phones, combined with Arnold's depiction of the antiquated art of door-to-door sales makes for an oddly retro exploration of human inter-

action – something which is sometimes exploited for its comic potential. When Jake manages to sweet-talk his way into an expensive-looking suburban household during door-to-door duties, he is rewarded by a music video-style dance routine (garden hoses and all) by its pre-teen residents. It's hard not to be charmed by LaBeouf, all wounded masculinity and lopsided smile. "He was being quite tough at the beginning, but I was kind of like, 'Come on. Smile. Honestly, you've got a great smile,'" says Arnold. When I suggest that LaBeouf's Jake rides a delicate line between being a boy and a man throughout the film, she nods. "I hadn't thought about it that way, but I think you're right."

American Honey is not a perfect film. It's long and occasionally listless, stretching out like the endless summer experienced by the travelling mag crew. And the dialogue is often unnaturally expositional, especially in the scenes that explicitly explore the invisibility of the underclass and their otherwise unspoken American dreams – to have "a family" or "a trailer", "to see the ocean". Yet the script's lack of subtlety is brashly, authentically American.

"I saw so much; America's obviously a huge, great, complicated place, and I've grown up with a sort of version of America that's via Hollywood," she says. "This film is a lot about me going and looking and finding out a bit more." With the help of Ryan's photography, even the grimmest and most Spartan of locales are given a jewel-like sheen, highlighting the genuine joy that shines through all of Arnold's films about young people. Instead of gazing at this unwieldy world from behind glass, *American Honey* winds the window down and invites its onlookers inside. **S**



American Honey is released in UK cinemas on 14 October and will be reviewed in our next issue

GANG OF FOUR
(Clockwise from top left) Andrea Arnold's Oscar-winning short *Wasp* (2003), and her features *Red Road* (2006), *Wuthering Heights* (2010) and *Fish Tank* (2009)

DRIVE, SHE SAID

The road movie is generally associated with men, but the cinema is also full of women who take to the road, whether in pursuit of escape, adventure, crime or just that high-speed thrill ride

By Kim Morgan

As Tom Neal asks, wryly, in Edgar G. Ulmer's *Detour* (1945): "What kind of dames thumb rides? Sunday school teachers?" The answer? Or, what *should* be the answer. Yes, of course Sunday school teachers, why not? And waitresses. And writers. And runaway heiresses. And teenagers. Lana. Goldie. Bibi. Bonnie (you know which Bonnie). But Neal was voicing clearly what audiences and anyone, even now, driving through America or anywhere would think seeing a lone woman standing by the side of the road, thumb in the air: what is her story? Or, what in the hell is wrong with that woman? Neal avoids the warning signs and picks up a vicious yet vulnerable Ann Savage anyway, sealing his fate by accidentally strangling her with a phone cord in a hotel room. Whoops. This is not Claudette Colbert, big guy, and you are most definitely not Clark Gable. You're in Ulmerville, remember?

Well, Savage, as Vera, didn't exactly deserve to die (not that anyone really does), an intriguing element to *Detour* as we both feel for Neal sitting in the car with that terrifying woman, and feel for Savage as she... back to this: what is her story? Beyond the man she fended off, who Neal happened to kill (why is Neal always just happening to kill someone?). She is so much more than a stock femme fatale (most femme fatales are), a skinny drifter so bitter and exhausted she nearly saps herself of sex appeal, even as she's attractive, never down-shifting to the sweet spot by using any of her charm or lustful eyes, all those pretty distractions that kick in for a woman's survival or manipulation. She's too damn pissed off and road weary. Promises of sex, soft skin smoothing out the edges and dusting off the dirt? Sure, it's possible, but just what is Neal going to do with her in that hotel room? Jesus Christ. We actually didn't expect that. Not in that way. Poor Vera.

So, taking on the genre, or sub-genre of women-on-the-road movies, and thinking of Savage, an agent of fate, it's hard to not think of all women in road movies, an expansive genre I can't cover entirely within this space – there are just too many. Because going through road movies, women play an integral part within them, a genre generally associated with men,



Road to nowhere: Ann Savage and Tom Neal in Edgar G. Ulmer's *Detour* (1945)

Even now, seeing a lone woman standing by the road, thumb in the air, anyone would think: what is her story?



Sandrine Bonnaire in *Vagabond* (1985)

save for the distinct and obvious movies – such as Ridley Scott's *Thelma & Louise* (1991), Herbert Ross's *Boys on the Side* (1995), Gus Van Sant's *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues* (1993), Agnès Varda's *Vagabond* (1985), Barbara Loden's *Wanda* (1970), Tamra Davis's *Crossroads* (yes, the 2002 one with Britney Spears – a terrifically fun road trip melodrama), Todd Haynes's sublime *Carol* (2015) and, most recently, Andrea Arnold's *American Honey*.

Arnold's much-buzzed picture, her first American movie, features a girl named Star (Sasha Lane), who takes off from an abusive Oklahoma home to sell magazines on the road, a retro-sounding endeavour, but something Arnold had read about. There's a boy and girl on the trip – Jake (Shia LaBeouf) and Krystal (Riley Keough) – and they all rumble through the Midwest packed up in a van, enjoying and enduring the expedition. But this is a female story,



something Arnold has a wonderful sensitivity and acumen for. The young woman's journey is at the heart of all Arnold's movies, even without a highway to be rolled down (*Fish Tank*, the most powerful), but Arnold wanted to chronicle the specificity of the American road – so much so that she took a road trip herself. As she said in Cannes: "The West is very dramatic. I had some quite difficult times being by myself travelling in that open wilderness... a mix of the America I grew up with – that I saw through Hollywood, romanticised – and contemporary America that I saw when I did my trips."

Make note, this is the America Arnold grew up with – in movies. The road has always been a place for cinematic escape, discovery and freedom, or some kind of inert existential crisis (Monte Hellman's 1971 masterpiece *Two-Lane Blacktop* is the best example, and also features a crucial, evocative 'girl' played by Laurie Bird), but one we associate with McQueen, Gibson, Oates and Fonda (and Oates and Fonda together: see *Race with the Devil* from 1975). That road Jack Kerouac wrote about, a place for "crazy, illuminated hipsters suddenly rising and roaming America, serious, bumming and hitchhiking everywhere, ragged, beatific, beautiful in an ugly graceful new way". That's for men. The women stayed home.

Actually they didn't: not in cinema, anyway. Just think of them: Veronica Lake in *Sullivan's Travels* (1941), dressing as the cutest little boy you've ever seen, tramping along with Joel McCrea's 'O Brother, Where Art Thou' tour; Peggy Cummins driving John Dall (and backing the hell up, beautifully) in *Gun Crazy* (1950), the travelling carnival sharp shooter who drags Dall's butt into this enormous mess in the first place; Ellen Burstyn in *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (1974), manning the station wagon to T.Rex's 'Jeepster', enduring her son's absurdly long gorilla joke, getting the hell out of town after Harvey Keitel goes bat-shit crazy in her hotel room; Elizabeth Scott, turning full sociopath, abandoning wifehood for dough in *Too Late for Tears* (1949); Bibi Andersson hitching a ride in, yep, Ingmar Bergman's road movie, *Wild Strawberries* (1957); Bonnie Parker living and dying in that car in *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967); Uma Thurman rolling all over the world for her "roaring rampage of revenge" in *Kill Bill: 1 & 2* (2003-04); Goldie Hawn busting her husband out of the slammer in *The Sugarland Express* (1974), resulting in one of the most entertaining and ludicrous police pursuits in movies; Barbara Stanwyck taking on her captor, sexy, smirky Ralph Meeker as he eats all her crackers and confesses his love for cheap perfume ("It doesn't last as long, but it hits harder"), and doing anything for her husband (anything!) in *Jeopardy* (1952);



Have gun will travel: Susan Sarandon and Geena Davis in *Thelma & Louise* (1992)

Charlize Theron's Furiosa taking over for Tom Hardy in *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) to become the actual hero/heroine of the story; sad, troubled Janet Leigh driving to her doom in *Psycho* (1959); and on and on and on...

These women often motivated the action or were simply driving to save themselves, to escape their lives – but within these stories are passages to self-discovery, both positive and negative. The perils of the path are part of it. You obviously see this in horror movies like *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) and *The Hitcher* (1986): the road can ravage you; it's not easy for a woman out there, wherever she may travel. This is also clearly detailed in Ridley Scott's *Thelma & Louise*, perhaps the most iconic women-on-the-road movie (can we think of another?) and certainly scary



Faye Dunaway as Bonnie in *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967)

in terms of just how dangerous this trip can get. An unhappy housewife, the ravishing, goofy-faced, gorgeous, loveable Thelma (Geena Davis), and her exacting, organised waitress best friend Louise (Susan Sarandon) could not be more different. But they head off together on a road trip, Thelma escaping the obnoxious demands and criticism of her ridiculous husband, Louise for her own reasons. They yearn to have a good time and bond, with Thelma feeling the pull of sex, dancing and playing along in a country club. But then that innocent flirtation turns into a sexual assault and attempted rape in a parking lot, leading to Louise killing the offender with a gun. Did she need to do that? That's one of the picture's questions. Louise's extreme action is deeper rooted and angry – something she'll get to later in the movie – giving this poignant moment, at least in part, a feminist undercurrent. By placing two women in this predicament – first on the run from their lives, just a happy escape, and then, literally, on the run for their lives – all sorts of beauty and experience and empowerment occurs. Thelma even enjoys a night of good sex (Brad Pitt, who can forget?), even if the sweet cowboy turns out to be a scoundrel and hauls off with their loot. Thelma regrets it, a man has loused it up again, but then... should she regret it?

Rather than judge Thelma, the picture

shows how these normal, healthy attempts to enjoy her sexuality and liberty spin into the unexpected adventure/nightmare of the road, one they don't deserve. My god, Thelma just wanted to get laid, like any man would. Why do they need to suffer so much for this? And so the story ends up tragic (or inspiring) when they take that controversial suicide jump. But what is the spirit of the picture? That they kamikazed off that cliff, or that they found themselves during those long, colourful drives? I think most would agree they found themselves, which makes their deaths all the more upsetting and moving. Can you be a woman and make it through without patriarchy pulling you down? As Louise yells when Thelma suggests going to the police after the man is shot: "Thelma, we don't live in that kind of world."

Indeed we do not. But, you know what? Some women do have fun and don't suffer the consequences. Interesting that the woman who has perhaps the best time on the road, full of pleasure and sex and self-discovery, did so, not in 1994 or 2004 or even 2014, but in 1934, in Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night*, one of the first and greatest road movies – and really a movie about a woman on the road. Yes, runaway heiress Claudette Colbert is accompanied by the brash and manly newspaperman Clark Gable, but she's the one who started it all. Jumping off a boat to abandon unwanted upcoming nuptials, she is not just being a bratty little rich girl, she is asserting her independence, subverting the role designated by her gender and class. Stuck with Gable (if you call that stuck), she'll enjoy lots of sniping sexual tension, coach riding, open breeze hitching and some interesting sleeping arrangements – those hot "walls of Jericho". Gable spies a plum opportunity in Colbert with an exclusive story, but feelings will deepen between the high-class broad and the dreamy doughnut dunker, and they'll not only gaze at each other, but at America, understanding for a time what it means to be hungry or how, in a lovely scene, singing on a bus ride can be one of the most strangely enjoyable activities. And then, of course, hitchhiking – something Gable lords over Colbert in one of the picture's most famous scenes, with Colbert swiftly halting a car by a mere glimpse of her leg. Is that too much? No way, it's not. It's sexy as hell – she's being clever, using her feminine wiles, but also enjoying herself and her beauty, her newly developed street smarts and the romance of the road. She's to be celebrated. One could say she is damn lucky (if you've seen William Wellman's *Wild Boys of the Road*, the road isn't as easy as all that) and this is a screwball comedy: she's not going to die for this. She got what she wanted, she did not take the detour Neal and Savage took.



Cars and girls: Quentin Tarantino's *Death Proof* (2007)

The women in 'Death Proof' enact revenge on, not just the stuntman, but symbolically, all the creeps on the streets

Not so lucky as Colbert, but enduring, and challenging both the danger of men and the actual road at high speed, are three women who won't wind up in death or having a romance but, instead, with the *Vanishing Point* car, being pursued by homicidal stuntman Mike (Kurt Russell). That's Quentin Tarantino's *Death Proof* (2007), one of the most pro-woman road movies ever made (it also has the rare distinction of showing women who actually want to look at a cool car, without their boyfriends dragging them along to do so). The picture's set of likeable, down-to-earth

women enact *Thelma & Louise*-style revenge on, not just Mike, but symbolically, all the creeps on the streets who want to ram them – in this case, in a psychosexual act of vehicular rape. It's inspiring – almost overwhelmingly so – when we see real-life stuntwoman Zoë Bell actually strap herself to that Challenger (she is really on that thing, taking away the fantasy of it all...), at what looks to be about 80-90 miles per hour, and then unstrapped, clinging to – and climbing on – that car for dear life. The movie ends with the three stomping Mike to April March's 'Chick Habit' – these women are not jumping off a cliff. With that, *Death Proof* is a feminist rebel yell: "No, you are not going to ruin our time! No, you are not going to hurt us! No, you cannot drive!" This one's for Vera, Thelma, Louise, Claudette and all the sisters of the road. Faster pussycats! And better yet: drive, she said. 🚗



Without a hitch: Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert try to thumb a ride in *It Happened One Night* (1934)

PATH OF GLORY: THE UNSTOPPABLE DRIVE OF KIRK DOUGLAS

As the actor approaches his 100th birthday, we celebrate his extraordinary career, which saw him swiftly ascend the ranks of Hollywood aristocracy following his 1946 debut, with a host of classic roles playing ruthless villains, morally ambiguous mavericks and self-interested sharks

By Philip Kemp

In a few weeks' time, Kirk Douglas will celebrate his 100th birthday. It's all the more considerable an achievement given that in 1991, aged 74, he was involved in an air-crash that killed two people and left him with a debilitating back injury; and five years later he suffered a stroke that severely damaged his ability to speak. Despite this, having undergone speech therapy, he continued to act, playing his last onscreen speaking role – to date, at any rate – in the melodrama *Illusion* (2004). He also appeared in a French TV drama-doc, *Empire State Building Murders*, in 2008, but it was a non-speaking role.

You could almost think of it as typecasting. For an actor who based his long screen career largely on playing tough, driven, all but unstoppable characters, such resilience seems almost ridiculously apt. On screen he suffered physical assault even more often than Marlon Brando. He was crucified in *Spartacus* (1960), had an eye torn out as leader of *The Vikings* (1958), lost a finger in *The Big Sky* (1952), died from concussion in *Champion* (1949), got wrapped in barbed-wire in *Man Without a Star* (1955), was fatally bitten by a rattlesnake in *There Was a Crooked Man...* (1970), got run over by a truckful of lavatories in *Lonely Are the Brave* (1962), and of course lost an ear as Van Gogh in *Lust for Life* (1956). But Douglas's sufferings suggested nothing of Brando's soulful masochism; he faced

them with clenched defiance and, if he survived them, came roaring back all the tougher. (That questionable apophthegm, "That which doesn't kill me makes me stronger", might have been coined for him.)

Many commentators, not least Douglas himself, would trace his rebellious stance back to his upbringing. Born in the upstate New York burg of Amsterdam, the son of poor Russian-Jewish immigrants, he and his six sisters were brought up by their illiterate mother after their father (the 'ragman' of Douglas's 1988 autobiography *The Ragman's Son*) jumped ship. Douglas, eager to escape ("I was dying to get out. In a sense, it lit a fire under me") and to act, talked his way into a place at St Lawrence University and worked his way through college waiting on tables. As a Jew, he found himself barred from many of the college societies. It's not surprising then that once established as a Hollywood star, he set out to gain total control over his projects, forming his own production company, Bryna – named after his mother – in 1955. A lifelong Democrat, he favoured maverick directors like André de Toth and Stanley Kubrick, and famously helped break the blacklist that had been established during the anti-communist witchhunts of the late 1940s by giving Dalton Trumbo – one of the banned 'Hollywood Ten' – screen credit on *Spartacus*. 

HEAVYWEIGHT STAR
In his breakthrough movie, Mark Robson's *Champion* (1949), Kirk Douglas plays a boxer who treats everyone around him – his manager, his disabled brother, the women in his life – with contemptuous brutality





'I've made a career of playing sons of bitches,' says Douglas. Sometimes the s-o-bs showed redeeming qualities, but as often as not they didn't

PLAYING IT BY EAR
(Clockwise from above) Kirk Douglas as Vincent van Gogh on the set of Vincente Minnelli's *Lust for Life* (1956); and with Burt Lancaster in *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* (1956) and *Seven Days in May* (1964)



In Douglas's first film, *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* (1946), he played a weakling, Barbara Stanwyck's alcoholic husband, but that was a rare exception. From there he jumped straight into his default position of grinning ruthlessness as the gang boss in *Out of the Past* (aka *Build My Gallows High*, 1947), overseeing the downfall of Robert Mitchum with tight-jawed relish – and thereafter, in his own words, “I’ve made a career of playing sons of bitches.” Sometimes the s-o-bs showed redeeming qualities, but as often as not they didn’t.

Not that they were necessarily one-dimensional, for all that. Billy Wilder, with his innate knack for casting, chose Douglas as Chuck Tatum, the scruple-free reporter in *Ace in the Hole* (1951), exiled to Albuquerque and hoping to earn his ticket back to the big time by exploiting the misfortune of a wretched bozo trapped in an underground crevice. The star is at his most abrasive and reptilian (“I’ve met some hard-boiled eggs in my time,” says Jan Sterling, playing the victim’s wife, “but you – you’re 20 minutes!”), yet in the scenes where Tatum worms his way into the cavern to reassure the trapped guy (Richard Benedict), he exudes sympathy and fellow-feeling. We know he’s faking it, of course, but Douglas plays it so wholeheartedly that we find ourselves wondering if this isn’t a genuine side of Tatum that he’s callously repressed.

LUCKY CHARM

Charm was the essential flipside of Douglas’s driven ruthlessness, and it’s much in evidence in *The Last Sunset* (1961), a relatively little-seen western from Robert Aldrich. Top-billed is Rock Hudson as straight-arrow Texas Ranger Dana Stribling, who’s crossed into Mexico to bring outlaw Brendan O’Malley (Douglas) back to justice. But Douglas (whom Aldrich found ‘impossible’ to work with) effortlessly walks off with the film, stealing it not only from the stolid Hudson but also from Joseph Cotten, trapped in a dull role as a drunken ex-Confederate officer. Cotten’s married to Belle Breckenridge (Dorothy Malone), who runs their Mexican ranch, and when O’Malley shows up it’s soon evident they have history; he took her virginity when she was a teenager and seems inclined to renew the relationship with her – and start one with her teenage daughter Melissa (Carol Lynley).

Though Belle later – and rather implausibly – transfers her affections to Stribling, both women are clearly captivated by O’Malley, for all that they know he’s a killer. Douglas deploys all his dangerous charm, and further fascinates Melissa with a penchant for rather cheesy nature poetry, courtesy of screenwriter Dalton Trumbo: “Not many people know of it; not many people care, but the sea is a place where the seamen shoe the hooves of the wild sea mare.” Not many actors could convincingly deliver doggerel like this, but Douglas, with his “smile like ice breaking” (as critic Tom Hutchinson put it), carries it off with style. He even manages to bring off the corny ‘bad man redeemed’ ending without histrionics. About to marry Melissa, he’s told by Belle (truthfully or not, we never know) that she’s his daughter and in effect commits suicide: meeting Stribling in a shoot-out, he draws what proves to be an unloaded gun and is shot dead.

Douglas and Trumbo had form, of course. A year before the release of *The Last Sunset*, *Spartacus* had given the blacklisted Trumbo his first screen credit in a decade. Whether Douglas (who was producing through Bryna

BET NATIONAL ARCHIVE (2)

or Otto Preminger with *Exodus* (1960), also openly credited to Trumbo, deserves the accolade of being the first to defy the American Legion and the anti-commie hunters has been much debated; Douglas has always claimed that it was his example Preminger followed, and that's the line broadly accepted by the recent movie *Trumbo* (2015). According to Karina Longworth and Matthew Dessem in their article 'Did Kirk Douglas really break the blacklist?', it's a case of "six of one, half-dozen of the other: Preminger announced he would give credit to Trumbo first, but Douglas actually did it first, because *Spartacus* beat *Exodus* to theaters by three months".

Either way, it was a brave move in the prevailing political climate, and fitted well with the film's theme of a man intrepidly defying the powers-that-be. Douglas's performance, though, is one of his least interesting; cut off from the darker side of his screen persona, all he can do is start off heroically courageous and carry right on getting steadily more so. Lines like, "I do know that, as long as we live, we must remain true to ourselves," don't help any, coming from an actor so adept at portraying duplicity. This granitic stance is shown up too by the urbane flexibility of actors like Peter Ustinov and Charles Laughton; the latter slyly remarked that when acting with Douglas, "You have to be careful not to act too well."

There's more light and shade in Douglas's previous outing with Kubrick, *Paths of Glory* (1957). As Colonel

Dax, charged with defending three French privates chosen at random to act as scapegoats for the incompetence of their commanders during World War I, he embodies the film's moral centre; but in his first scene with General Mireau (George Macready) he does a subtle job – mainly through eyes and body stance – of letting his underlying contempt for the man show through the initially amicable banter between the two. (The film so offended the French government that it was banned in the country for 17 years.)

Douglas's view of Kubrick, whom he invited to direct *Spartacus* after firing Anthony Mann, was that he was "a talented shit". The opinion was reciprocated. Douglas's drive and intelligence were widely recognised – Elia Kazan called him "the most intelligent actor I've ever worked with" – as was his tireless dedication to his roles. His preparation was legendary: to play a jazzman based on Bix Beiderbecke in *Young Man with a Horn* (1949) he studied with trumpeter Harry James for three months; he hired an artist to teach him to paint for *Lust for Life*, put in nights at an NYPD precinct prior to *Detective Story* (1951) and even taught himself to juggle for *The Juggler* (1953). This fierce dedication didn't always win him friends. The gossip columnist Sheilah Graham described him as "boastful, egotistical, resentful of criticism – if anyone dare give it"; and *Photoplay* magazine once called him "the most hated man in Hollywood".

ALL THAT JAZZ
Kirk Douglas with (below from left) Doris Day and Lauren Bacall in *Young Man with a Horn* (1949), which follows the highs and lows in the life of a trumpet player



From Graham to Martin Amis (who caricatured him as the monstrously egotistical Lorne Guyland in his 1984 novel *Money*, drawing on his experience scripting Stanley Donen's execrable 1980 sci-fi movie *Saturn 3*, in which the 63-year-old star insisted on a naked fight scene with Harvey Keitel) the downside of Douglas's character has been amply documented. From the point of view of his career, though, it could be considered an asset. The screenwriter Ben Hecht once told him, "You know, Kirk, you have a really great quality because they love to hate you." In his breakthrough film, Mark Robson's *Champion*, Douglas plays a boxer who treats everyone around him – his manager, his disabled brother, the women in his life – with contemptuous brutality. It won him the first of three Oscar nominations for Best Actor.

Douglas's most enduring screen partnership was with Burt Lancaster. The pair made six films together, from the noir thriller *I Walk Alone* (1947) to the self-consciously elegiac *Tough Guys* (1986). The most successful of them at the box office, John Sturges's *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* (1956), plays Douglas's drunken, embittered Doc Holliday against Lancaster's principled Wyatt Earp. The chemistry between them works best while they still mistrust each other, and begins to lose traction once they join forces against the bad guys. In John Frankenheimer's political conspiracy thriller *Seven Days in May* (1964) their usual polarity is reversed, with Douglas's loyal Marine colonel out to stop Lancaster's megalomaniac Air Force general from mounting a military coup. Here the level of mutual aggression starts low and builds up, which works a lot better; as a duo, the actors are always at their best facing off against each other.

This may have reflected an element of reality. Frankenheimer later observed, "Kirk Douglas was very jealous of Lancaster; he felt he was playing a secondary role, which indeed he was... He wanted to be Burt Lancaster; he's wanted to be Burt Lancaster all his life." Sensitive to the difference in height between them – Lancaster was four inches taller – Douglas often wore built-up heels when they acted together. Lancaster once hid the heels during a shoot by way of a practical joke, to Douglas's mortification. "Kirk would be the first person to tell you that he's a very difficult man," Lancaster remarked at a dinner in Douglas's honour, "and I would be the second."

There were certain genres Douglas was totally unsuited for, such as light comedy. An early effort, *My Dear Secretary* (1948), in which "I tried to play Cary Grant", proved as much, but he tried again in *For Love or Money* (1963), with equally dismal results. But while his blazing-eyed, teeth-clenched ferocity fitted perfectly into out-and-out swashbuckling action films like *The Vikings* ("A cowboy movie deep down," he admitted), from early in his screen career it's always been moral ambiguity that's elicited his finest performances. In Vincente Minnelli's *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952) he plays a Hollywood producer (reckoned to be based on David O. Selznick), his career on the skids, who appeals to three people he exploited on his way to the top – a writer (Dick Powell), an actress (Lana Turner) and a director (Barry Sullivan) – to help rescue his latest project. Despite their acrid memories of him, they all finally come on board and, thanks to that Douglas charm (arrogance every so often slipped aside to reveal an underlying vulnerability), you can see why they would.



SLAVING FOR PERFECTION
Douglas with Woody Strode and Stanley Kubrick on the set of *Spartacus* (1960, top); and with Vincente Minnelli and Cyd Charise during the filming of *Two Weeks in Another Town* (1962, above)

And it was Minnelli again who cast him as Van Gogh in *Lust for Life*. Taking full advantage of his physical similarity to the artist, Douglas delivers a deeply felt portrayal of tortured, inarticulate intensity and self-doubting fury that all but overcomes the Hollywood clichés (not least Miklós Rózsa's overwrought score). Even this, though, didn't net him an Oscar: he had to make do with his third Best Actor nomination (the second was for *The Bad and the Beautiful*) while Anthony Quinn, on screen for barely ten minutes as Paul Gauguin, won Best Supporting Actor. Not until Douglas was nearly 80 did Hollywood finally give him an Oscar – and that was an Honorary award as much for his extensive philanthropic work as for his acting. But to a man who considers movie-making "a form of narcissism", the lack of the odd accolade perhaps won't trouble him too much as he approaches his century. 

 A season of Kirk Douglas films is screening at BFI Southbank, London, in September and October. A video montage of Douglas's greatest performances is now available online at bfi.org.uk/sightandsound

Artificial Eye

CELEBRATE

• 40 YEARS OF REMARKABLE FILMS •



VISIONARY. BOLD. REVERED.
AVAILABLE ON DVD & BLU-RAY™ STARTING
12 SEPTEMBER

amazon.co.uk CURZON
ARTIFICIAL EYE

Free Super Saver Delivery and Unlimited One-Day Delivery with Amazon Prime are available on eligible orders. Terms and Conditions apply. See Amazon.co.uk for details. Amazon, the Amazon logo and Amazon.co.uk are registered trademarks of Amazon EU S.A. or its affiliates.

new films



fopp stores

bristol college green
cambridge sidney st
edinburgh rose st
glasgow union st & byres rd
london covent garden
manchester brown st
nottingham broadmarsh
shopping centre
oxford gloucester green

foppofficial #gettofopp fopp.com

life feels good
released 12/09/16



clean hands
released 26/09/16



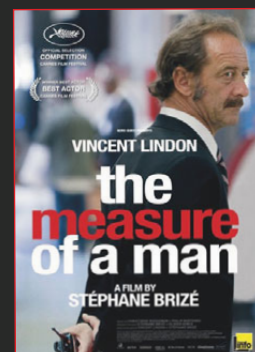
blush
released 12/09/16



panama
released 03/10/16



the measure of a man
released 12/09/16



BOYS IN THE HOOD

The burgeoning friendship between a pair of 13-year-old boys is threatened when a bitter feud develops between their parents, in Ira Sachs's beautifully observed 'Little Men', set against the background of gentrification and spiralling rents in a middle-class Brooklyn neighbourhood

By Graham Fuller

The independent films of Ira Sachs, which quietly observe how ordinary people respond to seismic ordeals in modern times, achieve the kind of emotional clarity and resonance associated with the work of Ozu Yasujiro and Robert Bresson. They have some of the quality too of E.M. Forster's novels – and the three Merchant Ivory movies made from them. Forster's belief that people should “only connect” across class gaps extends, in Sachs's latest film *Little Men* to generational conflicts. Like Forster, Sachs unostentatiously harnesses manners, mannerisms and speech – including body language, looks, things said and unsaid – in exploring socially determined behavior.

Following *Keep the Lights On* (2012) and *Love Is Strange* (2014), Sachs's *Little Men*, his deceptively low-key latest film, completes an unofficial trilogy of New York dramas that have been reductively labelled ‘queer’. Set against the background of gentrification and spiralling rents in a contemporary middle-class Brooklyn neighbourhood, it centres on two 13-year-old boys, Jake Jardine (Theo Taplitz) and Tony Calvelli (Michael Barbieri), who bond over their shared love of Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson books and videogames; for Jake at least, even if unwittingly, their friendship is a dry run for future romances.

It is threatened, though, by the wilfulness of their warring parents. Upon the death of Jake's paternal grandfather, the boy's father Brian (Greg Kinnear) and aunt

Audrey (Talia Balsam) inherit the old man's house. On its ground floor is a modest dress shop run by Leonor Calvelli (played by the great Chilean actress Paulina García), Tony's single mother, who had been the old man's confidante. When the cash-strapped actor Brian and his psychotherapist wife Kathy (Jennifer Ehle), urged on by Audrey, seek to drive up Leonor's rent, the consequences for the boys is devastating.

A Memphis-born indie director with a quiet European arthouse sensibility that blossomed in 2004's *Forty Shades of Blue*, Sachs is a master of the unforced moment. His formal economy of style is not sacrosanct, however. As the emotional chips fall in *Little Men*, the camera suddenly breaks its moorings and, in the film's most lyrical and liberating sequence, follows Jake at a distance as he skates out of his ‘hood and takes off towards the bridge that connects Brooklyn to Staten Island.

Graham Fuller: Is the title *Little Men* a conscious play on the Louisa May Alcott novel of that name?

Ira Sachs: Very much so. Not the story in that book, which I have read, but in terms of small lives made big, which is what they can become when you give them artistic attention. It's the idea that these lives represent something and are meaningful. Then there's the question of maturity, both for the kids and the adults in the film. Who do we become? Who, for example, does Greg Kinnear's character become after his father's wake? And how do we come to the decisions we make?

GF: Jake and Tony struck me as unerring portraits of white, middle-class Brooklyn boys. How did you find these two remarkable actors?

IS: I wanted to find two boys who would be memorable to the audience, like the actresses [Tippy Walker, Merrie Spaeth] in George Roy Hill's *The World of Henry Orient* [1964] or that kid [David Bradley] from *Kes* [1969]. You cannot forget him – impossible. He's like your cousin. That gave me the confidence not to look at thousands of kids. I looked at 100 and I found these two and made a movie with them. I adapted it to certain elements they brought to the story that made it very organic

KIDS IN AMERICA

Michael Barbieri as Tony Calvelli (opposite, left) and Theo Taplitz as Jake Jardine (opposite, right) in *Little Men* by director Ira Sachs (right)





There's a place for this kind of cinema, but it doesn't necessarily work if what you're trying to do is achieve globalisation or higher returns for corporations

for them to reveal who they were as people and to bring as much of their own selves to the role, which is how I work with all actors. It was the same with Greg Kinnear and Jennifer Ehle as Jake's parents.

Neither Theo nor Michael had been in a movie before. I found Theo through an agent in Los Angeles. The [video] material he sent in as an audition was like a documentary based on Jake. Michael came from an open call here in New York. He contains Italian-American history in him because of his specific New York self. His grandmother is still living in the same Mott Street apartment [in the old Little Italy district] she was born in. There's a great Renoir quote where he says something like, "When you shoot a movie, keep the windows open and let the world in." I tried to do that. For example, in the script, Tony did *capoeira*, a Brazilian martial art that requires you to be well trained, but since Michael studied acting at the Lee Strasberg institute, I let the idea of Tony wanting to be an actor into the movie. I worked with a pretty specific script and I would say 90 per cent of the film came from it, but maybe ten per cent was improvised from the specifics of the actors.

GF: Can you elaborate on that?

IS: I thought of Michael as my Scorsese actor and Theo as my Bressonian actor. Theo brought an incredible stillness to the film. I just spent four days doing press with him in Los Angeles and realised what an extremely emotionally intuitive child he is. You notice that when he's acting he's having responses which have layers and layers of meaning. That's very cinematic, ultimately, because it's from his point of view you enter the whole universe of the film.

GF: In the opening scene, set in a classroom where the kids are letting loose because their teacher's stepped out, Jake is drawing a picture with a green sky that the teacher mocks when he returns. I also notice that when someone darts toward his desk, Jake flinches. He is gentle and feminine, whereas Tony is what is thought of as more conventionally masculine.

IS: Michael/Tony is a really sweet kid, so the sweetness comes through his masculinity. His masculinity also seems not quite fully formed yet. There's an imitative quality. When I was shooting the scene in the disco, where he hits on the young girl, I felt like I was shooting *Bugsy Malone* [1976]. It's the disconnect between the child and the adult that gives that scene its humour. I guess 'feminine' is interesting. I'm a sensitive gay man, and my sensitivity is part of my masculinity. I was raised by my mother and I went to an almost all-girls school, so I learned a lot from women.



LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR
Greg Kinnear and Jennifer Ehle as Jake's parents Brian and Kathy (right), and the great Chilean actor Paulina García as their tenant, and Tony's mother, Leonor Cavelli (opposite)

GF: *Variety's* critic wrote that *Little Men's* sub-plot – which I think is much more than a sub-plot – concerns “two heterosexual teens”. It seemed self-evident to me that whether or not he is aware of it, Jake has a crush on Tony, so his sexual orientation cannot be so emphatically defined.

IS: Their relationship is open enough that individual audience members can project as they wish on the story. That's not really out of intention, it's out of situation. Once I cast the actors as Jake and Tony – and specifically once I cast Theo – I felt I couldn't impose a future on them. It just felt non-organic to who he was as a kid, and it also reflected a kind of innocence that I experienced in my own relationships as a kid. I had sexual relationships, but they weren't with my friends. There was a kind of freedom in the non-charged space that I had with my best friends that the film shares.

GF: Tony's comments about girls, such as “I really go for red-heads,” which leave Jake unimpressed, sound like the kind of thing he would have heard an older male relative or a TV character say. I don't get the impression he is sufficiently into puberty to really feel what he's saying.

IS: That's true. There's a kind of performative quality. Near the end there's a scene by the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge and I've named the kid Tony. There's a sense that he's playing out a sort of Tony Manero role [the name of John Travolta's character in *Saturday Night Fever*, in which a key scene takes place on the same bridge], which is both himself and learned. Someone once told me, “By your senior year in college, you're a parody of what you wanted to be in your freshman year.” And maybe that's what we're doing right here, playing out roles. Certainly Brian, Jake's father, is trying to figure out what role he should play in his home, not just on stage as an actor.

GF: You show him rehearsing his role as Trigorin in *The Seagull*. Was that a significant choice?

IS: Only that it was a Chekhov play. Mauricio Zacharias, my co-writer, and I are writing a film about Montgomery Clift, who famously performed *The Seagull* in New York in the 50s, so we were wrapped up in the play already. We actually tried to get *No Exit* [*Huis clos*], but it's controlled by Jean-Paul Sartre's estate, and specifically by Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre, and we needed her approval but didn't get it. So then it was, “Well, let's go back in time so we don't have to deal with approval,” and Chekhov was there. But, of course, Chekhov resonates. Chekhov and Ozu are both artists who give me the kind of permission I feel I need to focus on everyday life.

GF: As in Ozu, small gestures speak loudly in your work.

IS: Bombs are going off emotionally in Ozu's great work that are monumental in their effect. I've got to hold on to that because I feel that the dress shop in *Little Men* is a metaphor for the kind of movies I love. There's a place for this kind of cinema, and value in the individual films, but they don't necessarily work if what you're trying to do is achieve globalisation or higher returns for corporations.

GF: Economic displacement and the emotional cost of gentrification are central themes in *Little Men*. We see their effect on both Jake – whose uprooting from Manhattan to Brooklyn echoes that of Ben [John Lithgow], who is separated from his partner [Alfred Molina] in *Love Is Strange* – and Leonor, Tony's mother, who faces the closure of her store and the loss of her livelihood.

IS: In *Forty Shades of Blue*, Laura [Dina Korzun] is from Russia; in *Keep the Lights On* there's a Danish filmmaker

[Thure Lindhardt]; and in *Little Men* there's a Chilean woman, Leonor. Being out of place is dramatic and it's evocative of a sense many of us have. To me, stories document change. Cities are forever in a state of flux and what I try to do is be attentive to that while crucially avoiding nostalgia and sentimentality. Going back to Theo, he recently talked about what went through his mind as Jake watches Tony from a distance in the Brooklyn Museum scene. What I suddenly recognised is that a coming of age occurs when a child realises there is a past – which is something kids don't live with because they're always in the present – and that there's a gulf between him and the past. There's loss in letting go and there's also movement forward. I feel I could be sitting here saying I miss the age of art cinema – which I do – but if I don't sit in that loss, I also recognise what's possible. There's a retrospective of my films at the Museum of Modern Art in New York at the end of July, which speaks to a sustained career.

GF: How do you feel about your earlier films?

IS: I feel they reflect something very deep about who I was at the time that I made them, but I don't think that's interesting to an audience, to be honest. By that, I mean I don't think who I was matters, and yet that fact is what gives my films their intimacy because I share some part of myself. I notice flaws in them but I also recognise some sort of consistent emotionality, and a patient way of getting there too.

GF: I noticed one near close-up of Tony and quite a lot of long shots in the film, but medium shots dominate. You avoid the emotional manipulateness that close-ups are sometimes guilty of.

IS: The medium shot is my passion, but I don't know why exactly. I think it has to do with the aesthetics, the frame, the connection between character and space: the box that it can create, meaning not just the flat two dimensions, but a sense of three dimensions. And in this film, I worked with the Spanish cinematographer Oscar Durán. We didn't want to be pedantic, but we were committed to a way of shooting this film.

Specifically, if I had to talk about my visual influences, I would say they began with John Cassavetes. Then I worked my way through the Ken Loach of *Kes*, *Family Life* [1971] and *Looks and Smiles* [1981]. And then Maurice Pialat. I haven't left Pialat, in the sense that I am still in some sort of intimate struggle with his work – *A nos amours* [1983] specifically, and also his first film, *Naked Childhood* [1969]. Jean Eustache's *Mes petites amoureuses* [1974], his film about childhood, was also a big influence on this film. I'm in conversation with European cinema. I feel much more connected to that history and I now hire within that. So I'm working with a Greek cinematographer [Christos Voudouris, *Love Is Strange*] and a Spanish cinematographer who aren't faking that tradition.

GF: Chris Menges shot *Kes* and *Looks and Smiles* for Loach. They were very influenced by the Czech New Wave. There's a crispness and purity in the images.

IS: And a photojournalistic approach. Miroslav Ondříček's cinematography on [Milos Forman's] *The Loves of a Blonde* [1965] and *The Fireman's Ball* [1967] had a peripheral perspective on character; they're often shot from the side. We did that in *Forty Shades of Blue*. When I was slightly more uncomfortable with myself, the camera was the third point in the triangle. Starting with *Love Is*



Strange, the camera has become more central because I'm not shielding my emotions so much. The effect asks for different things from the audience.

GF: What led you to cast Paulina García?

IS: We wrote Leonor for her, after seeing her in *Gloria* [2013]. Neither she nor I were frightened of the thorny side of Leonor. There was a lot of questioning of her likeability, and we both loved her, including her bad strategy. She does what she knows how to do as best she can, but from the first minute you see her, she creates the tension in the film. Something is wrong, something is off. What I love about Paulina's performance, and to me it feels similar to Dina's in *Forty Shades*, is that it's both extremely natural and totally constructed. *Opening Night* [1977] is now my favourite of Cassavetes's films because it's baroque, and I feel Paulina's performance is a baroque performance in a totally naturalistic movie. There's something about the artificiality in certain moments in films that can make them fascinating in an unexpected way.

GF: Jake's parents are in professions where they should be able to see into people – Brian's an actor, Kathy's a psychotherapist – but they are blinkered when it comes to Leonor and Tony. I began to resent them for their middle-class privilege and their insensitivity to a relatively poor immigrant woman and her son.

IS: We tried to not stack the cards in any one direction too much. The rich are not that rich and the poor are not that poor. They're similarly educated, but have different opportunities. Some people who've seen the film experience a fluctuation about its moral centre – which is an important part of its suspense. It's the Highsmithian part of the film – you don't know exactly what to feel. I've often misquoted Renoir's line from *Rules of the Game* [1939] as "Everyone has their reasons." But the real quote – someone corrected me – is, "The terrible thing is that everyone has their reasons." The first part of the sentence is so important. The "terrible thing" is where the drama happens in the film. People have different responses to their own morality when it starts to infect their pocket-book and their ability to sustain their way of life. That's when morality gets interesting. ☺



Little Men is released in UK cinemas on 23 September and is reviewed on page 84

A coming of age occurs when a child realises there is a past and that there's a gulf between him and the past. There's loss in letting go and there's also movement forward



MY FATHER THE HERO

Despite having had its funding pulled and its production halted 48 days into an 81-day shoot, Víctor Erice's tantalising, incomplete 1983 film 'El sur' is still regarded by many as a masterpiece, telling the tale of a young girl's relationship with her secretive, emotionally distant father

By Mar Diestro-Dópido

It is virtually impossible to write about *El sur* (1983), the second feature in Spanish director Víctor Erice's highly acclaimed if small body of work – *The Spirit of the Beehive* was made ten years earlier and *The Quince Tree Sun* nine years later – without revealing its plot as it stands, for about a third of this virtuoso, lyrical coming-of-age story was never actually filmed: a fact which also accounts for much of its cult status. Regardless, it is still arguably Erice's most accessible film, seen like *The Spirit of the Beehive* through the eyes of a young girl. Here we follow Estrella between the ages of seven to 15, a period in which she reflects in voiceover on her infatuation with both her emotionally withdrawn father Agustín and the mythical south of Spain where he hails from and is never able to return to, and the events that led to his eventual fall from grace.

Co-written with Erice's late partner Adelaida García Morales and based on her eponymous 1981 short novel, *El sur* had a scheduled shoot of 81 days based on a 400-page script. During the second week of filming, prolific Spanish producer Elías Querejeta (*The Hunt*, *Cría cuervos*) announced that the funds from Spanish state broadcaster RTVE might be withdrawn owing to a change in its general director. Querejeta brought the project to a halt after only 48 days of shooting, and just before the crew was

due to film in Carmona, a small municipality in Seville province where location scouting had already begun.

The footage apparently moved the then director of the Cannes Film Festival, Gilles Jacobs, so much when he saw it in Madrid that he invited the film into Competition on the spot, for which Erice edited what is known today as *El sur*. The remote, and for some observers naive notion that the rest of the film might be shot at some later date became, paradoxically, even more unlikely in light of the overwhelmingly positive reactions of the national and international press, which hailed the unfinished film as a masterpiece from the off, albeit one shrouded in mystery.

Mystery also surrounds Estrella's father Agustín (played by the enigmatic and charismatic Omero Antonutti), a doctor who works in the municipal hospital of a northern city and divines water for the locals with a pendulum. He spends the rest of his time locked in the attic where he cannot be disturbed, for, as Estrella's mother Julia explains to her, "That is where all his energy is kept." Whereas in the novel Estrella's narration was presented as a direct address to her father, in *El sur* the voice we hear is the adult Estrella's, speaking from the future.

As the object of Estrella's adoring gaze, Agustín is constructed in the film as a figure of mythical proportions, a man whose past in the sun-drenched south leads his daughter to imagine a utopian Andalucían paradise, completely at odds with their isolated life in the harsh greyness in the north of Spain. In fact Agustín was forced to leave the south because of his political beliefs, but it's his very apartness and obvious difference to the locals that casts a spell on an infatuated Estrella. That blinding childhood love soon shades into disenchantment when Estrella discovers that her father is in turn infatuated with someone other than her mother, his magical aura slowly but irremediably beginning to evanesce.

The feeling of intense intimacy that imbues García Morales's novel is perfectly captured in the film's sublime first scene. Contrary to the suggestion of warmth and light in the title, the film opens on a black screen in complete silence. As the day dawns, in the right-hand corner of the screen a frosted window slowly appears, illuminating a bed in which lies the 15-year-old Estrella, who wakes up to learn that her father has disappeared forever, leaving her his beloved pendulum. It is in this twilight zone between shadows and light, knowledge and silence, adulthood and innocence that Erice shapes and sculpts the film's closeted atmosphere.

It is 1957, almost 20 years since the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco imposed a totalitarian regime founded on shadows, secrecy and lies. Forced to leave the south as a result of his opposition to the regime and look elsewhere for work, Agustín's inner exile finds its corporeal equivalent in the rented house the family settles in, an isolated enclave located in a virtual no-man's land reachable only by a long tree-lined path, on the outskirts of a city surrounded by walls and geographically enclosed by a river. The house's name, 'La Gaviota' ('the seagull') references the south seas of many an adventure book, a land to discover, not merely as a geographical enclave, but also as a state of mind; and yet, intrinsically rooted to the land, it also signals the impossibility of being set free.

It is within this physical and emotional prison, desolate and forlorn, that Estrella's mother, Julia, endures Agustín's detachment, a state of non-communication not dissimilar to that of Ana's parents in *The Spirit of the Beehive*. At first glance Julia's character seems underwritten – she didn't even have a name in the novel – but in fact her role is pivotal. Where the father is absent, emo-



NORTHERN EXPOSURE
Omero Antonutti as Agustín with his daughter Estrella, who is played as a young girl by Sonsoles Aranguren (left and top) and as a 15-year-old by Icíar Bollain (above)

tionally locked in an idealised past, Julia is completely present and emotionally available, the facilitator of a possible future for Estrella. The surprise visit of two women from the south – the distant, bossy paternal grandmother and, more importantly, Milagros, the woman who raised Agustín and whose name means 'miracles' – will open up a way out for Estrella, not least the chance to visit, at the film's end, the long-dreamt-of south.

A republican teacher who was the victim of reprisals after the Civil War, Julia, like the other women in the film – including Estrella herself in the unrealised complete script – is a bridge able to connect and unite, enabling the symbolic pendulum to oscillate from north to south, from cold to warm, and more importantly, from the shadows to the light. Not only does Julia furnish Estrella with details of what may have happened between republican Agustín and his Francoist father, giving her daughter a sense of what lies behind her father's emotional shutdown, but she also places those domestic events firmly in their social and political context.

In order to evoke Estrella's complex inner world, to illuminate what is after all made up of memories and gaps filled with fantasies, Erice, like an alchemist, gives each sequence emotional depth and shading by means of a very precise use of light, breathtakingly



SOUTHLAND TALES
 Sonsoles Aranguren with
 (left) Omero Antonutti and
 Victor Erice on the set of
El sur, and (right) playing
 Estrella in the film, with Lola
 Cardona as her mother Julia

Sadly, the complete version of 'El sur' will always remain a mystery, lurking in the shadows like the figure of the father, bereft of its ending

✚ executed by legendary cinematographer José Luis Alcaíne – Almodóvar's regular DP – and camera operator Alfredo Mayo, and hugely influential ever since. To achieve this, Erice's avowed cinematic reference points – Jean Renoir, Roberto Rossellini, Ozu Yasujiro and Mizoguchi Kenji – are to some degree supplanted by painterly ones, most obviously Vermeer and Rembrandt, with Alcaíne's extreme contrast of light and darkness also calling to mind Caravaggio's chiaroscuro and the tenebrism of the baroque Spanish school.

Such methods help bestow on the father that otherworldly quality so strongly projected by Estrella, as he emerges like a ghost from the darkness whenever he appears on screen. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that it is in the darkness of a cinema that Agustín's past is also resurrected, when his ex-lover Laura (Aurore Clément), now a film star called Irene Ríos, materialises as the femme fatale in the self-referential – and fictional – *Flor en la sombra* ('Flower in the Shadow'), a *film noir* Estrella catches her father watching. Cinema is thus the realm where, for Agustín, and by extension Estrella, reality and fiction merge.

Estrella's newfound knowledge and insight, born in the cinema, will reshape her experience of life, and as a consequence her father's gestures, routines and mysterious tools will no longer work their magic. Her new perspective (suggested by a literal tilt of the camera) on her everyday world only serves to emphasise how heavily burdened she and her mother have been by Agustín's demons and frustrations, as much as by dire political circumstances. Events start to mirror each other, like the swing of a pendulum, and what was once mysterious and enticing is now bathed in the harsh light of reality; the *paso doble* danced by father and daughter, which marked the highest point of togetherness in their relationship – masterfully depicted in one of the most magical travelling shots in film history – is echoed in a scene eight years later, sealing their irrevocable separation.

Crucial to envisaging what would have been Erice's final version of *El sur* is the knowledge that the transition from north to south, from the Basque Country to Andalucía, was one that Erice actually made with his family when he was growing up. Estrella too was supposed to make the physical and emotional journey

her father never made and discover, not the mythical south seen in the postcards she repeatedly stares at during her childhood, but its realities as Erice himself experienced them. What's more, the ending – broadly corresponding to the last 12 pages of the novel – would guarantee an emotional and geographical symmetry essential for Erice's moral schema in the film. Estrella would meet in the south a young man she would intuit was her younger half-brother (a fact never made implicit in the script), to whom she would pass on Agustín's pendulum before leaving Andalucía, having uncovered its mysteries and making her peace with her father.

In fact everything in the original story led to an act of reconciliation, of maturation on the part of Estrella's character, rendering *El sur* both a human portrait but also a metaphor for a divided Spain. It was in the unfiled scenes in the south that Erice planned to establish a direct dialogue with the Civil War, through Laura's brother, a role given to Fernando Fernán-Gómez (Ana's father in *The Spirit of the Beehive*). Sadly, the complete version of *El sur* will always remain a mystery, lurking in the shadows like the figure of the father, bereft of its ending, only visible as, in Estrella's own words, "a very intense image that in reality [we have to] make up", based on fragments, interviews and endless online discussions.

In a sparse, superbly directed scene between father and daughter in an empty restaurant near the end of the film, what is in effect Agustín's last confession to Estrella identifies his own longed-for Arcadia with the possibility of being able "to tell everyone what you think", of being emotionally free. This was echoed in the final sentences in Erice's completed script, which consisted of a description of the southern seas as a utopian state of mind, a paradise, lifted from Robert Louis Stevenson's travel memoir *In the South Seas*, a gift to Estrella from her brother and read aloud by her. And yet, as it stands, I would argue it is the quote which opens Morales's novel, by lyric romantic poet Friedrich Hölderlin, that best conjures the magic of *El sur*'s masterful, if forever incomplete current version: "What can we love that might not be a shadow?"



***El sur* is rereleased at BFI Southbank, London, and select UK cinemas from 16 September. A video essay about Erice will be available online at bfi.org.uk/sightandsound**

“Kobayashi's monumental film can clarify and enrich your understanding of what it is to be alive.”

A.O. Scott, New York Times

“Unquestionably the greatest film ever made.”

David Shipman, The Story of Cinema



The towering masterpiece of Japanese cinema out
SEPTEMBER 19TH

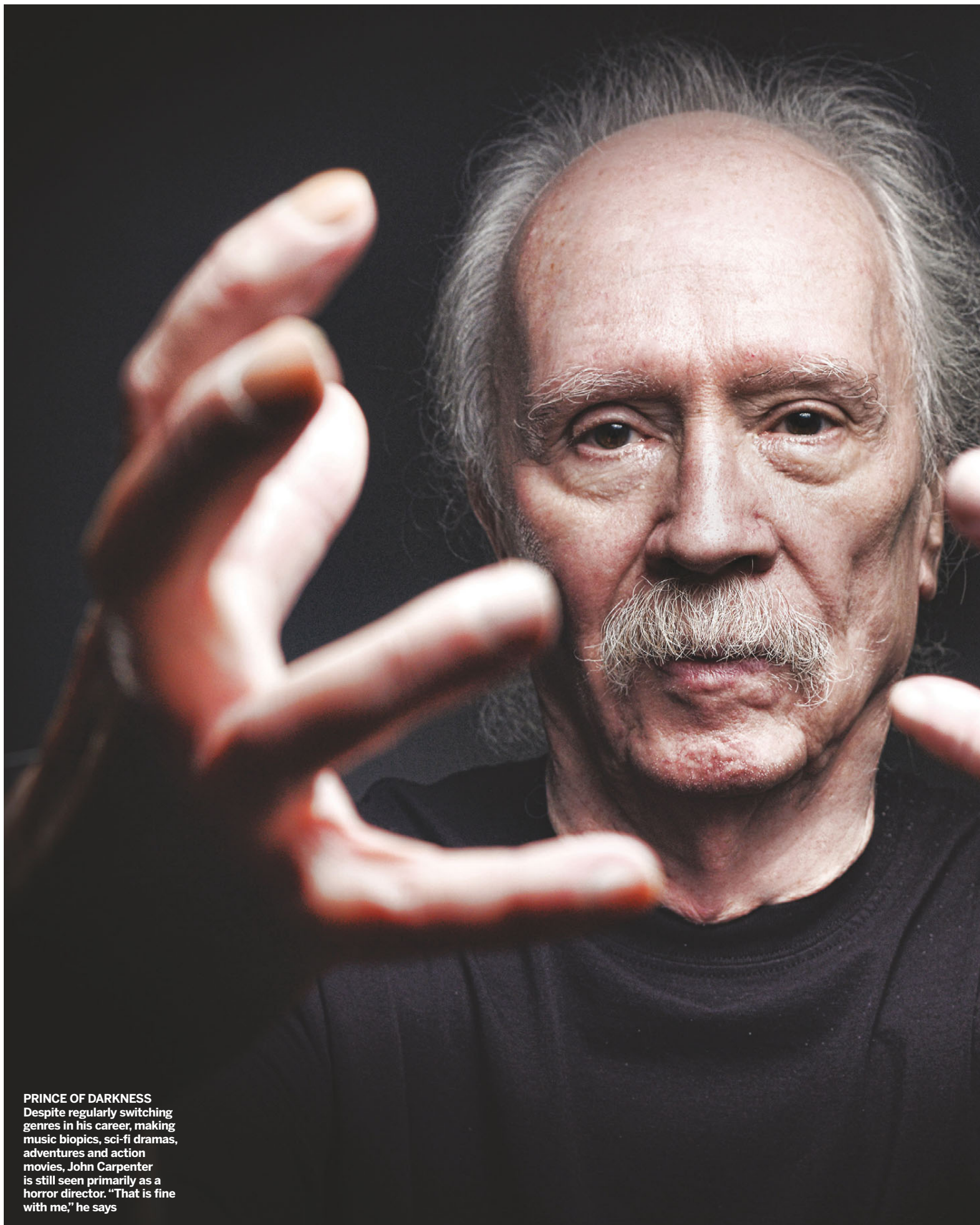
Explore more world cinema classics



ARROW
ACADEMY

for all the latest information on forthcoming releases visit:

f /ArrowAcademy www.arrowfilms.co.uk



PRINCE OF DARKNESS
Despite regularly switching genres in his career, making music biopics, sci-fi dramas, adventures and action movies, John Carpenter is still seen primarily as a horror director. "That is fine with me," he says



BLOOD ON THE TRACKS

John Carpenter, the one-time powerhouse of genre cinema from 'Dark Star' and 'Halloween' to 'The Fog' and 'Escape from New York', talks about growing up in the Jim Crow American south, his love of Hammer and Howard Hawks and his favourite scene from any of his films

By Geoffrey Macnab

When John Carpenter was studying film at the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts in the late 1960s, the students received a lecture from a very notable guest: Howard Hawks. Not that the legendary director of *The Big Sleep* (1946) and *Rio Bravo* (1958) tried very hard to ingratiate himself with them. "He was kind of a tough guy – a cold, tough guy... he looked at us like we were bugs," Carpenter says.

You can't help but notice the irony. Carpenter in person is aloof, a little like Hawks must have been, or like one of those cussed old-timers played by Walter Brennan in Hawks westerns. He has agreed to an interview reluctantly, immediately after a performance he and his band have given at the Neuchâtel International Fantastic Film Festival (1-9 July) in Switzerland, where they played music from *Halloween* (1978) and his other films as well as tracks from his recent *Lost Themes* albums.

Hawks, Carpenter remembers, was a very polarising figure among the undergraduates at USC. This was the height of the Vietnam War and some felt Hawks's films were too gung-ho and violent. Carpenter, though, revered him and still cites Hawks as a major influence, highlighting the darker aspects of his work.

"Hawks was known in the movie business before



PHOTOGRAPHY BY KYLE CASSIDY

he did *Red River* [1947] as someone who did very dark films that had frightening moments in them. If you watch *Ceiling Zero* [1936], there's a scene where an airplane comes screaming down and crashes. Watch *Only Angels Have Wings* [1939] – the scene where the plane wants to land in the fog. It is really tense. I think he had the ability to make a horror film.”

In fact, at one stage, Carpenter notes, Hawks almost did direct a full-blown horror film, *Dreadful Hollow*, a vampire story scripted by William Faulkner. Hawks was also heavily involved in the making of *The Thing from Another World* (1951), the movie that Carpenter was later to remake as *The Thing* (1982), to the displeasure of its original director, Christian Nyby.

“What is it about Hawks?” Carpenter muses. “It’s the way he uses characters and their gestures to express internal feelings and the fact that he makes a moral point in his movies. I really, really respond to that.”

It wasn’t just Hawks who visited the students in those USC days. So did Roman Polanski, Orson Welles and John Ford, among others. Ford, contrary to his reputation, was “very nice” to the students. They were supposed to watch *The Quiet Man* (1952), but no colour print was available and Ford refused to allow them to watch it in black and white, so they sat through *Stagecoach* (1939) together instead. But Carpenter had no time for the sentimentality or blamey in Ford’s work. “Ford is an immigrant director, Hawks is an American director – they are two different things,” he states, as if that is the defining difference. He seems to be suggesting that despite being born in the US, Ford was weighed down by a nostalgia for his Irish roots and that mawkishness crept into a work as a result, whereas Hawks, who was descended from American pioneers, had no such problems.

Like Hawks and Ford, Carpenter has regularly switched genres in his filmmaking career. He has made music biopics, sci-fi dramas and adventures. In S.D. Bob ‘Snake’ Plissken, the hero of *Escape from New York* (1981) and *Escape from L.A.* (1996), he created an early prototype of the type of wisecracking, bad-ass anti-hero found in countless subsequent action movies. Nonetheless, just as Hawks and Ford are often typecast as directors of westerns, Carpenter is seen primarily as someone who makes horror films. Not that he is complaining. “That is fine with me,” he says.

Now 68, Carpenter has an ambiguous status in Hollywood. On the one hand, his name still carries considerable symbolic weight. Genre fans idolise him, as do a

I was amazed by ‘Forbidden Planet’. I was like, ‘Wow, what is this?’ I don’t know if I knew what directing meant yet, but that’s what I wanted to do. I just knew it

SPACE ODDITY
John Carpenter’s debut feature, the satirical, philosophical sci-fi film *Dark Star* (1974, below), emerged from his time at the University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts

generation of younger directors. Earlier this summer, when Miramax and Blumhouse Productions announced plans to revive the *Halloween* franchise, they made sure everyone knew that Carpenter was aboard as executive producer. (Carpenter may also write the music for the new *Halloween* film.) On the other hand, the director’s recent commercial record is patchy. He has only made two features this side of the millennium – *Ghosts of Mars* (2001) and *The Ward* (2010) – and neither was a success. Nowadays, he spends as much time on his musical activities as his filmmaking, and will be in London for *Halloween* to give a concert.

“It is just so much fun to do. It is just such a change from what I used to do for a living,” he says of his new life as a musician on the road, playing keyboards in a band alongside his son and godson.

Carpenter was born into a musical family. His father, Howard Ralph Carpenter, was a music professor, a conductor and instrumentalist who had recorded and performed with Johnny Cash, Roy Orbison and Brenda Lee. “He introduced me to music when I was very little. Our house was full of it. I heard classical music all the time. He tried to teach me the violin. Unfortunately, I had no talent and that didn’t work out, but I picked up keyboards and guitars and so forth. I just grew up with music.”

SOUTHERN MAN

When he was five, the family moved to Bowling Green, Kentucky, from Carthage, New York, after his father found a job as professor of music at the music department of Western Kentucky University. Carpenter didn’t much relish his time there. “This was the Jim Crow south in the 1950s and 60s. It was a pretty cruel place. It wasn’t a fun place to be. My parents and I were fish out of water. We were Yankees from northern New York... we were way out of our depth.”

Carpenter remembers the separate entrances for blacks and whites for bathrooms and the segregated drinking fountains. Growing up in the pre-civil rights south, he regarded cinema-going as a way of escape. He talks in rhapsodic terms about the sci-fi films, westerns and B movies he used to watch. In 1956, when he was only eight, he had his moment of epiphany when he saw *Forbidden Planet* (1956) for the first time. “I was amazed at what I was looking at. It was just so magical. Coincidentally, it was a film that had a totally electronic film score. It just blew my mind. I was like, ‘Wow, what is this?’”

From that moment, Carpenter claims, he was set on becoming a filmmaker. No, he didn’t realise *Forbidden Planet* was inspired by Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. All he knew was that it was a “grand space opera” and that he was determined to direct movies in a similar vein. “I don’t know if I knew what that [directing] meant yet, but that’s what I wanted to do. I just knew it.”

Carpenter can also recall precisely when he saw Hawks’s *Rio Bravo* for the first time: at the cinema in Bowling Green in 1959 when he was 11 years old. He loved it. (As every Carpenter fan knows, his 1976 thriller *Assault on Precinct 13* was partially based on it.) At first, he steeped himself in Hawks westerns. Then, later, he began to discover his comedies and adventure films.

Alongside Hawks movies, Carpenter was watching a surprising amount of British horror. He reels off the names of Hammer films, such as *X The Unknown* (1956),



The Curse of Frankenstein (1957) and his beloved Quatermass films, which also reached his local cinema. “*Quatermass 2* was unbelievable – what a dark movie,” he enthuses. A little disappointingly, his admiration for British cinema didn’t extend to Powell and Pressburger. In its treatment of voyeurism and violence, *Halloween* has several overlaps with Michael Powell’s *Peeping Tom* (1960), but Carpenter denies there was any direct influence. “I don’t think I saw the whole of *Peeping Tom* until I was in my 40s. It’s a pretty savage film, an interesting movie.”

In his late teenage years, Carpenter was faced with a decision: he could either stay in small-town Kentucky, where he was by then playing in a cover band, or he could head west to take his chances at USC. He chose the latter. “Coming from Kentucky to Los Angeles was like coming home for me. It was grand.”

It was at USC that Carpenter met Dan O’Bannon, his collaborator on his satirical, philosophical sci-fi movie, *Dark Star* (1974). “That came from a film we both loved, *Dr. Strangelove*, which was very influential. That was part of it, the absurdist humour in it.”

He declines to go into details about the collaboration with O’Bannon or why it ended, saying simply, “We were kindred spirits. We both loved science fiction. Dan was a very talented production designer and he was a very strange character.” Shot on 16mm, *Dark Star* was Carpenter’s idea. He wrote, scored, produced and directed it – and its success enabled him to establish a foothold in Hollywood, albeit initially as a writer. “That was the only way I could get into the business. I had an agent who said, ‘You have to write your way in.’ Like every young director, I was not as good as I thought I was.”

His early credits as a writer included *Eyes of Laura Mars* (1978), directed by Irvin Kershner and starring Faye Dunaway and Tommy Lee Jones. “They weren’t going to let me direct. It was the big Columbia film and I realised very quickly I wasn’t going to direct it. They gave you a deal in those days... I took their money so I had to live with it. It wasn’t a very good movie. It wasn’t my movie exactly either. The fashion business – I had nothing to do with that. It was all written by somebody else.”

Right from the start of his career, Carpenter has divided the critics. He remembers one reviewer writing, “*Assault on Precinct 13* is an example of how not to make a thriller and the man behind it is: John Carpenter!” But the Brits played an important part in his emergence. Not only were the Hammer movies a key early influence but the London Film Festival rescued *Assault on Precinct 13*. Its UK distributor, Michael Myers of Miracle Films, had persuaded the LFF to programme it after its unsuccessful US release and the audiences, and British critics loved it. (The film had also screened earlier to an enthusiastic response at the Edinburgh Film Festival.) Miracle then agreed in advance to release Carpenter’s next movie, *Halloween*, and Carpenter responded by naming its slasher bogeyman after Myers. “Michael Myers released *Assault on Precinct 13* and so the *Halloween* character is named after him, as an homage,” Carpenter says.

Halloween had come about after Carpenter was approached to direct a horror film by Irwin Yablans, who had founded distribution company Compass International Pictures in 1977, and Syrian American financier Moustapha Al Akkad, both of whom had seen and enjoyed *Assault on Precinct 13*.



GOLDEN YEARS
John Carpenter’s early run of genre classics included *The Thing* (1982), *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976), *Escape from New York* (1981) and *Christine* (1983)





Unless your movie is in 3D, the only way to show an object is three-dimensional is to track around it. I love tracking shots, love 'em. I am Max Ophuls reincarnated

When Carpenter was casting *Halloween*, he always intended to use a British actor to play the psychiatrist Dr Sam Loomis. If it wasn't going to be Christopher Lee or Peter Cushing, he wanted Donald Pleasence. "Pleasence said to me, 'I don't know why I am doing this movie. The only reason is my daughter likes your music'," he says. Nonetheless, he became close friends with the actor. "Donald gave me one of the great lessons of my early career. He said, 'There are two ways I can play this.' This was the scene where he [Pleasence] has just shot him off the balcony and he looks down and Myers has gone. He said, 'I can either play this 'Oh, my God!' or 'I knew this would happen.'" I said, 'Can you do it both ways?' He did and 'I knew this would happen' was the scariest. He taught me a lesson. I would have thought 'Oh, my God!' might have done it, but I was wrong."

One very striking aspect of *Halloween*, set in generic small-town America and shot in South Pasadena, California, is its use of tracking shots. It is full of sequences with characters – especially its heroine Laurie (Jamie Lee Curtis) – walking and walking, seen in full frame, perhaps with the bogeyman Myers waiting behind the hedge in front of them. "I love tracking shots," Carpenter says. "They're beautiful. They move through an environment. Unless your movie is in 3D, the only way to show an object is three-dimensional is to track around it. I love tracking shots, love 'em. I am Max Ophuls reincarnated. What I like is widescreen tracking shots."

With regard to his experience directing young actors like Jamie Lee Curtis in the film, Carpenter says, "I didn't know what the hell I was doing but I came to realise that the director's job is to make the actors do the best they can do – to provide the environment for them to do their best work. It depends on what they need. If they need friction and conflict, you give them that. If they need love, you give them that. You have to be a little bit of a psychiatrist too."

He has little truck with the old Hitchcock idea that actors are like cattle. "That's bullshit. It's not true. You want these actors thinking about something. You don't want them dead, standing there."

Carpenter also says that he doesn't have a vision beforehand of exactly what the finished film will look like or how he will cut it. He storyboards the complex scenes but otherwise relies on instinct.

Halloween helped usher in a new era of low-budget filmmaking. Carpenter had approached it in a similar spirit to his student films at USC. The main reason he did the music, for example – which is now acknowledged as one of the film's strongest elements – is that they wouldn't then have to pay for the score.

The film was given a regional release. It started off in Los Angeles, then the same prints moved to San Diego and, from there, across the country. The reviews therefore trickled out in piecemeal fashion. Many were hostile. "Carpenter is not gifted with actors," the director remembers one of them saying. It was only when the film was re-reviewed by the *Village Voice* that it began to be taken seriously. Carpenter had negotiated a deal that gave him 10 per cent of the profits. "I did well," he says, with evident understatement. "But it [the money] didn't come all at once. You have to go after it. The movie business has a lot of notorious thieves in it, normally in the lower budget end. But what you do get is experience. So it is a trade-off sometimes."

Besides, he insists, the money wasn't ever the issue; he wanted to establish himself as a professional film director and that's what *Halloween* enabled him to do.

After *Halloween*, Carpenter went on a remarkable run. *The Fog* (1979), *Escape from New York* (1981), *The Thing* (1982) and *Christine* (1983) followed in quick succession.

He is pragmatic about the way the system works and the jobs he has sometimes had to take. *Christine*, for example, sounds like an exercise in compromise by everyone involved and he admits he directed it because he needed a job. The writer of the novel, Stephen King, "didn't have a thing to do with it. He sold the rights and said good luck." Carpenter thought the film turned out OK, but it isn't his favourite. Ask which he cherishes the most and he immediately names *The Thing*.

"It has my favourite scene of any film I ever directed, which is the blood-test scene," Carpenter says. "I thought I could do something with it because it involves all the characters and they are all suspicious of each other. In one scene, we're going to find out which one of them is a monster, with this one test. Is it this one or this one or this one? I really enjoyed doing that."

In recent years, Carpenter has been shunted increasingly to the margins. His films in the 90s were markedly less successful at the box office than those he had made in the 80s. Like many others, he bemoans the way the corporations have taken over Hollywood. "It's not one person greenlighting a movie. It's a group, the marketing department... people who have no interest or knowledge in the movies are saying yes and no based on their guesses. It is very strange."

Even if he isn't the commercial force he once was, Carpenter remains one of the few directors whose name works as a brand. He has various projects in development and insists that cinema remains his first love, even though he felt he needed to take his foot off the pedal for a while to concentrate on his music. "I just overdid it and burned out," he says. "I had to stop. I had no life. It is so stressful. I love it, but you can't do it as much as I was." ❧



A selection of John Carpenter's films is screening at BFI Southbank, London, in October and November. He will be performing a selection of his horror soundtracks alongside new work at the Troxy, London, on 31 October

RAKE'S PROGRESS
Jamie Lee Curtis in Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978), a film which helped usher in a new era of low-budget filmmaking



moviemail
is the place for film buffs managed by film buffs. We handpick the best DVD and Blu-ray releases, adding new titles every day across film and TV. We love World and Indie Cinema, Docs, Vintage Classics, Cult, Horror, Westerns and Film Noir. Our blog, written by experts, delivers daily reviews, feature articles, and competitions. Visit us at moviemail.com and sign up to our newsletter. We'll keep you in the know on all things cinema, including exclusive offers.

Find us on Facebook & Twitter
@moviemail

Offer expiry date: 31/12/2016

EXCLUSIVE SIGHT & SOUND READER OFFER

Visit moviemail.com and register to get your **10% OFF** using code **SIGHT10** at checkout or tel: **0844 376 0009**

DESERT RATS

In a far cry from the bleak, satirical brilliance of the best Hollywood war films, a recent quartet of limp studio titles shamelessly exploits the instability and conflict in the Middle East to provide little more than an exotic backdrop for the stories of white Americans hoping to find themselves

By Violet Lucca





CASUALTIES OF WAR
 Todd Phillips's *War Dogs*
 (above), Tom Tykwer's *A
 Hologram for the King* (above
 right), Barry Levinson's
Rock the Kasbah (far left)
 and Glenn Ficarra and
 John Requa's *Whiskey
 Tango Foxtrot* (left)

"And if we do go to war, I can assure you – it will not be another Vietnam. Because we learned well the simple lesson of Vietnam: 'Stay out of Vietnam.'"

Dana Carvey as George H.W. Bush on 'Saturday Night Live'

From the start, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have prompted comparisons to the one in Vietnam: the extreme weather, history of resisting foreign invasion, insurgents, intractability and dubious motives for entering in the first place. Along with shaping the United States' overall media policy for subsequent wars, Vietnam also set the tone for Hollywood films commenting on the pointlessness and horror of war, from the bleak and satirical (*Apocalypse Now*, 1979) to the melodramatic (*Platoon*, 1986). (Naturally, the 'pointlessness' bit went out the window once studios started making movies about these new wars.) In a recent, conspicuously homogeneous quartet of Hollywood films set in and around Iraq and Afghanistan – Barry Levinson's *Rock the Kasbah*, Glenn Ficarra and John Requa's *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*, Tom Tykwer's *A Hologram for the King* and Todd Phillips's *War Dogs* – world-weary, apolitical washouts go to the region in a last-ditch effort to redeem themselves (or just get some cash). Despite the films' cynical, wannabe-edgy comic approach to their wartime milieus – in the vein of Robert Altman's *MASH* (1970) or Mike Nichols's *Catch-22* (1970) – each reflects key longstanding ideological positions held by the US government and its allies about the region at large.

Existing within the 'Overton window' (the range of political beliefs that are considered socially acceptable at a particular moment), but subject to the pressures of military oversight (all films using the uniforms of the armed forces are subject to approval by their respective branches), these films unsurprisingly fail to offer a critical view of the wars, but nor do they provide a truly satisfying comic experience or much catharsis.

Save for *A Hologram for the King* (which is based on Dave Eggers's novel of the same name about a salesman in Saudi Arabia), each film is an adaptation of a true story – or something like it. *Rock the Kasbah* is based on the documentary *Afghan Star* (2009) – which followed four aspiring pop stars in a reality TV competition in Afghanistan – but refocuses its attention on a fictional American talent agent; *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* is based on reporter Kim Barker's memoir *The Taliban Shuffle*, which details her breakneck transition from rookie office-bound newspaper reporter in Chicago to foreign correspondent in Afghanistan, where she spent time embedded with US troops (for the film, she's transposed from print to on-air



cable network talent); and *War Dogs* is based on a *Rolling Stone* exposé of twentysomething arms dealers Efraim Diveroli and David Packouz, who made millions from military contracts with the US government through deals with shady overseas suppliers.

In all four narratives, the basic arc is the same: a loser who can't quite cut it in America decides to make a go of it in Afghanistan, Iraq or Saudi Arabia. In part they do so because of who they are, in part because of the economic situation following the 2008 banking crisis (Tom Hanks's Alan Clay in *A Hologram for the King* does an embarrassing cover to the camera of 'Once in a Lifetime' by Talking Heads, talk-singing an altered set of lyrics to list the things he's lost). Once there, they find a wacky, English-fluent driver who loves old Western pop music and has a hilariously out-of-date car; this man serves as their guide in their new surroundings and assists in their spiritual realignment. By night, they indulge in the secret boozy parties held by other outcast Westerners (drug dealers, arms dealers, prostitutes, bouncers), racking up hangovers and hook-ups like they're still in college. Despite this irresponsibility, our fishes out of water don't just regain a sense of control over their lives, they begin to thrive – but, in the case of *War Dogs* and *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*, they fly a little too high and put themselves and others into danger, and are forced to retreat whence they came, albeit much wiser. For those protagonists who don't lose themselves in greed and self-centredness, they find love in their new surroundings, their fragile egos fully restored. In another country, you can get all of the things promised to you by the American dream, even if you don't really deserve them; maybe it's not such a bad idea to stay.



Because these films are centred on white American fuck-ups who have stumbled into the Middle East almost by accident, any sense of cultural sensitivity goes out the window. Instead, the dangerous, rundown and Eastern nature of their surroundings become fodder for unfunny jokes that lack the subversive edge dark humour requires. Bill Murray's Richie Lanz deadpans about beheadings; Jonah Hill and Miles Teller accidentally stop for gas in Fallujah (before being rescued from a car of faceless insurgents by a Black Hawk helicopter while Wagner's 'Ride of the Valkyries' blares on the soundtrack); Alan Clay's driver quips about the abuse of foreign workers in Saudi Arabia; and Tina Fey's Kim Barker makes multiple cracks about how women in burkas look like IKEA bags. By emphasising these differences without bothering to contextualise them, or, say, offer up a fully developed native female character, they help reinforce the notion that while it's been pretty rough going, it's ultimately a good thing coalition forces are trying to sort things out with nation-building. Or, in the case of *A Hologram for the King*, the promise of Westernisation, beyond the luxury condos and excessively fancy video conferencing technology, is presented positively in the form of Alan Clay's paramour, Dr Zahra, a single divorced mother. Saudi Arabia comes off best out of the countries in the films – aside from the fact that it isn't an active warzone, the Saudis are, after all, US allies, despite the royal family's longstanding support of Wahhabists (a fundamentalist movement in Sunni Islam, embraced by jihadists in Isis and elsewhere).

But the portrayal of Saudis seems positively derogatory when compared with the heroic and easygoing characterisation of the US military – at their worst, the servicemen just seem to be a little tired and hot. *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* offers the most detailed views of coalition forces by virtue

of its protagonists' profession: the rise of the embedded journalist may have helped protect reporters from being kidnapped by enemy forces, but it has also enabled the military to gain greater control over what is reported and served to shift the focus away from the nasty business of war to personalities and easily recognisable, often trite narratives. While following a group of marines who have been tasked with building wells rather than fighting, Kim Baker records one of the men making a slightly sarcastic remark that she includes in her dispatch to the network; later, she hears a rumour that he was relocated to the dangerous Helmand Province as "punishment" and lost his legs to an IED. Upon returning to the States, Kim goes to visit him at his idyllic rural home, where he reassures her that it wasn't her fault, and offers up a bit of folksy advice: "Embrace the suck and move forward." Although this may offer a refreshing counterpoint to the image of the violent, broken veteran, it's also conspicuously tidy, and effectively directs the focus away from his war wounds and back to our lovable loser.

This isn't a new narrative trick by any stretch of the imagination. Mirroring Hollywood films about the 1960s civil rights movements, the actual pain and transformation in this recent cycle of films has been displaced on to an uncomplicated white person, and the actual conflict is turned into a backdrop and used as a way to push the dramatic plot of self-actualisation forward. Yet unlike the detectives Ward and Anderson investigating the racist murders in *Mississippi Burning* (1988) or the writer Skeeter who publicises the plight of black domestic servants in *The Help* (2011), the protagonists of *War Dogs*, *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* and *A Hologram for the King* don't actually make anything better. (*Rock the Kasbah* is an outlier in this sense, because Richie discovers Salima singing in a cave, and helps persuade her traditional family to support

Mirroring Hollywood films about the 1960s civil rights movements, the actual pain in this cycle of films has been displaced on to an uncomplicated white person

BROTHERS IN ARMS

Jonah Hill as arms dealer Efraim Diveroli and Miles Teller as his partner in crime David Packouz, in *War Dogs*



her musical career – at great personal risk to her and her family.) In contrast to a civil rights film, the underlying message of the story cannot be “look at how far we’ve come”, for there is no tangible triumph – like, say, progressive legislation – to celebrate. In *War Dogs*, arms dealers David and Efraim know that what they’re doing is wrong, and explicitly state that they don’t support the war; nevertheless, they exploit the system – and, eventually, each other – in order to get obscenely rich. (This setup, plus Jonah Hill’s involvement, naturally leads to comparisons with *The Wolf of Wall Street* – which it does resemble a little, although it’s much dumber.) Rather than peeling back the layers to examine the wider moral context, the film shifts the conflict to David’s repeated lies to his wife about how he’s earning his millions – which, of course, is resolved in the end, with David going to live as a humbled, happy man after serving his time. Any larger questions of culpability – his or the state’s – remain untouched.

Nevertheless, the films do espouse a type of wonky optimism by virtue of their redemptive narratives and as a consequence of when they are set: most of the action in *Rock the Kasbah*, *A Hologram for the King* and *War Dogs* takes place after the financial crisis but before the rise of Isis, a time when it seemed as though the gradual withdrawals of troops might lead to the permanent end of both wars. Though not perhaps as misleading as the reporting during the build-up and early weeks of the invasion of Iraq – where even the BBC was pilloried for its lamentable failure to give more than token airtime to voices opposing the war – during the first two-thirds of the Obama presidency, the news media more often than not avoided the news coming out of Iraq (save for reports of reducing the US military presence), and emphasised Afghanistan’s move towards establishing self-sufficient armed forces and police. Thanks to drones and elite SEAL

teams, the White House argued, we no longer needed expensive, endless wars with gruesome casualties on our side. None of these films challenge that view, ending before things take a turn for the worse again.

The shared decision to explicitly avoid the question of the righteousness or hellishness of individual wars – or war in general – also makes this quartet stand apart from previous films about Iraq and Afghanistan (such as *The Hurt Locker*, *The Messenger* and *American Sniper*), anti-war films released during the Vietnam war that were not set in that country (*MASH*, *Catch-22*, *How I Won the War*), or the first wave of films about Vietnam itself (*Limbo*, *Rolling Thunder*, *Heroes* and *Coming Home*). The last group lacked any real mark of authenticity – *Rolling Thunder* is essentially a romcom with a vet whose post-traumatic stress disorder is played off as more quirk than torment – but at least they had a moral core. *War Dogs*, *Rock the Kasbah* and *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* don’t even attempt to look for one. Their ambivalence toward such issues reflects a truth that lies at the heart of *A Hologram for the King*: the United States’ place in the world is not what it once was. But then, neither is Hollywood’s. What was once the premier vehicle for winning hearts and minds during wartime for the duration of the 20th century now has to compete with video games, virtual reality, television and the internet for consumers’ attention. These new modes of entertainment, produced with much faster turnaround times, have the ability more accurately to reflect and respond to current public feeling – and to pander ruthlessly to one side or another. Without a clear audience – they are too cynical to be overtly patriotic, but fail to be critical of anything beyond their clichéd characters’ flaws – these films exist for their own sake, speaking for no one. **S**



War Dogs is released in UK cinemas on 26 August and is reviewed on page 93

The decision to explicitly avoid the question of the righteousness or hellishness of individual wars makes this quartet stand apart from previous films about Iraq and Afghanistan

INNOCENT ABROAD

Tina Fey as journalist Kim Barker, with her fixer Fahim Ahmadzai, played by Christopher Abbott, in *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*



PREVIEW

DOWNTOWN RENEGADE

For 40 years Lizzie Borden has used film as a way of pushing at sexual and political orthodoxies. It's time the mainstream paid attention

Showing at the London Film Festival 2016

By Sophie Mayer

"Do you expect people who see the piece to understand the conceptual decisions that have gone into it?" the filmmaker Lizzie Borden asked

the artist Richard Serra in an interview about his drawings for a 2011 retrospective. Serra could have returned the question to Borden (his former video editor). Her *oeuvre*, four predominantly narrative features and a handful of commercial TV episodes, pushes at the limits of the conceptual. Simultaneously intellectually and sensorially exhilarating, Borden's work puts the conceptual into the corporeal and vice versa, clearly emerging from the downtown New York scene that she charted in her first film *Re-grouping* (1976).

Having moved to New York to pursue visual arts in the early 1970s, the young Borden wrote for *Artforum* about the conceptual art scene

around Serra and about performance artists such as Yvonne Rainer and Joan Jonas. Already a rebel – her teenage decision to change her birth name Linda to that of the notorious supposed murderer was "the best rebellion I could make" – she found herself radicalised by this aesthetic experimentation and by leftist feminism; she channelled that admixture into a curiosity about film, inspired by the work of Jean-Luc Godard and Gillo Pontecorvo.

What resulted was a filmmaking career unique even in the fluid zone of 1970s New York independent cinema. One marker is a comparison with her friend and early collaborator Kathryn Bigelow, who borrowed Borden's car to shoot her first short *The Set-up* (1978) between her cameo appearances in *Re-grouping* and Borden's second, and best-known, feature *Born in Flames* (1983). Bigelow, who emerged from a similar educational background in visual art and critical theory, went on to become the premier feminist filmmaker reimagining Hollywood genre movies; by contrast, Borden has only recently seen interest in her work revived on an international scale with Anthology Film Archive's restoration of a 35mm print of *Born in Flames*.

Shot over nearly five years for around \$40,000

– scraped together from small artists' grants and Borden's own income – the film became a cult classic. Borden said it was shot "on reversal. I would look at it, try not to scratch it, and edit it down and throw most of it away and then just make duplicates of what I wanted to save." As early as 1985 Teresa de Lauretis took it as inspiration for her argument for the emergence of a 'female gaze', noting that Borden's was a rare film that corrected "the invisibility of black women in white women's films... or of lesbianism in mainstream cinema". Arguing for its revolutionary aesthetic as well as its politics, de Lauretis perceives *Born in Flames* as the instigator of a no-wave, guerrilla feminist cinema that was never quite realised. Bigelow was not the only filmmaker in Borden's circle: the Irish director Pat Murphy and the screenwriter Becky Johnston (who wrote *Under the Cherry Moon* for Prince a few years later) both appear in *Born in Flames* as co-editors with

With its vérité cinematic language in the close confines of the brothel, 'Working Girls' was definitely not 'Working Girl'



Putting the conceptual in the corporeal, and vice versa: *Working Girls* (1986)

PHOTOEST INC. (C) BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (C)

Bigelow of the *Young Socialist* newspaper.

The film opens ten years after a social democratic War of Liberation in the USA, with the promise of social justice unfulfilled and women of colour finding themselves last among supposed equals. The first third of the film focuses on the slow formation of a Women's Liberation Army: mixed-race feminist groups represented by pirate DJs (played by Honey and the punk artist Adele Bertei) and, eventually, the white newspaper editors come together around the murder in police custody of the militant Adelaide Norris. The science fiction of *Born in Flames* is grounded by the film's documentary aspect: its world is the lower Manhattan of the late 1970s, diversely populated and ungentrified. The soundtrack also captures its moment: the way the DJs' beats and verbal blasts move out across the city prefigures the rhythmic presence of Mister Señor Love Daddy in Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989); the film takes its name from its theme song, by the 60s lo-fi proto-punk band Red Krayola (Borden initially intended to call it *Les Guerrillères* after Monique Wittig's novel of 1969).

In her study of the downtown New York art scene, *The (Moving) Pictures Generation* (2012), Vera Dika situates Borden as part of a shift toward narrative practices, and concomitant wider distribution, in downtown New York film, destabilising "both established avant-garde and mainstream film practices" through its focus on "the cinematic body, its poses and affects, now seen in transgressive states, and across the boundaries of sexuality and gender". Dika's book and Celine Danhier's 2010 documentary about the scene, *Blank City*, which includes an interview with Borden, are testimony to the revival of interest in an extraordinarily generative moment, which echoes our own – emerging from post-Vietnam nihilism through radical political formations and new technological possibilities that ended in gentrification. The work of Rainer and the choreographer and dancer Trisha Brown has been revived in London in this new era of austerity; Borden's improvisatory, everyday aesthetic is of a piece with theirs.

Jonas and other members of the downtown performance scene make brief appearances in *Re-grouping*, screened for the first time in 40 years at the Anthology retrospective in 2015. This summer it travelled to Edinburgh as part of an anniversary salute, curated by Kim Knowles and Isla Leaver-Yap, to the film festival's 1976 International Forum on Avant-Garde Film. Mid-1970s New York leaps from the screen – the time that B. Ruby Rich refers to in *New Queer Cinema* as "before the beginning", an embryonic moment of avant-garde film, performance art, political debates, neighbourhood degeneration, and experiments in living – including the emergence of lesbian feminist community and culture.

The film both documents and invents a community, using imagined scenes and reflexive voice-overs to give body to the thoughts and ideas of its initial subjects, a group of four white feminist academics in a discussion group. These imaginative, extra-diegetic innovations – particularly a lesbian sex scene – led the film's subjects to reject it, and Borden shelved it, despite an intrigued reception by critics such as Rich



Lizzie Borden on set

and Jonathan Rosenbaum. Throughout Borden's career, her daring challenges to film form and feminism's internal politics have inspired this oscillation between plaudits and brickbats.

Born in Flames was censored in Canada, criticised by feminists in the peace movement for showing its characters taking up arms against patriarchy, and described as "politically naive" at the Society for Cinema Studies in New York. Likewise, *Working Girls* (1986), a funny, downbeat narrative feature about sex work, met the scissorhands of the Ontario Censor Board and became associated with the 'bad girl' art wars of the mid-1980s, which saw filmmakers such as Abigail Child excluded from festivals, in line with the era's anti-pornography feminism, because of their depiction of sexuality.

With its cast of unknowns, its lesbian protagonist, and its use of an objective, *vérité* cinematic language within the close confines of the brothel, *Working Girls* was definitely not *Working Girl* (Mike Nichols, 1988). Borden spent six months interviewing sex workers across class boundaries about their working conditions and perceptions of the industry. She was responding in part to the Canadian documentary *Not a Love Story* (Bonnie Sherr Klein, 1982), which played a leading role in the anti-pornography stance of American feminists such as Catherine MacKinnon.

There are echoes and evocations of *Working Girls* across contemporary US women's cinema – for example, in the middle-class lesbian sex worker protagonist of Stacie Passon's *Concussion* (2013); but few films have taken the same abrasive, insightful position on sex work as work. Indeed, *Working Girls*' focus on labour politics, solidarity between the sex workers and de-pornifying the gaze missed its target, being received as titillation. Even as he praised the film's "self-effacing" cinematography (by Judy Irola), Vincent Canby counter-intuitively saw it as an argument that



Honey in *Born in Flames* (1983)

"sex is a natural resource that, as long as society remains as it is, might as well be exploited".

But its notoriety led to a \$6 million project with its distributors Miramax. *Love Crimes* (1991) was Borden's first time directing from someone else's screenplay – an erotic thriller about a district attorney (Sean Young) who allows herself to be kidnapped by the con artist she is investigating. She commissioned rewrites from Laurie Frank to shape the film to her politics, but lost control of the final cut and even of final say on the shoot; a planned role-reversal ending was scrapped. The version released in theatres was widely panned, but got enough interest for HBO to support Borden in releasing her own unrated cut on VHS simultaneously with the studio's R-rated home video release.

Borden's frank, fearless and often funny approach to sexuality in *Working Girls* and *Love Crimes* led to an unusual career in television, long before downtown New York contemporaries such as Susan Seidelman and Martha Coolidge were directing *Sex & the City*. She directed two segments of Playboy's softcore video anthology *Inside Out*, telling Cynthia Lucia that working for Playboy allowed her to return to the 1970s idea of "wild sexual expression". She then wrote the screenplay for the all-female portmanteau film *Erotique* (1994), which brought together an international quartet of filmmakers, including New German Cinema provocatrice Monika Treut and Hong Kong Second Wave director Clara Law.

With a resurgence of debate around sex work, including Amnesty International's endorsement of decriminalisation, *Working Girls* is due for a revival. *Born in Flames*, too, remains relevant; talking to Alison Kozberg about a screening earlier this year as part of the Walker Art Gallery's exhibition 'Downtown New York: 1970s Art and Film', Borden noted that the issues the film addresses "haven't gone away. Economic issues, Sandra Bland [who died in police custody in 2015], the murders of black men, women's issues, gender issues... in Hollywood, a mile away [from where Borden lives], where *Tangerine* was filmed, a transgender assault happens every couple of months... It's been decades and we need to fight harder than ever." As *Born in Flames* rises phoenix-like, Borden's uniquely wide-ranging *oeuvre* offers viewers the opportunity for a revolutionary Re-grouping: to go downtown and bring together the conceptual and corporeal once more. 

 **A restored version of *Born in Flames* will be showing at the BFI London Film Festival, which runs from 5-16 October**



Love Crimes (1991)

MISREAD MY LIPS

In Italian post-war cinema, dubbing dialogue was standard practice – and for the best directors, it was an artistic resource

By Sam Davies

In Anglo-American cinema, overdubbed dialogue tends to mean two things: a performance to be salvaged (Glenn Close revoicing Andie MacDowell in *Greystoke*) or cheap foreign imports hastily anglicised – kung fu flicks, spaghetti westerns, continental slashers. As a consequence, many will (unfairly) assume Claudia Cardinale was dubbed in Sergio Leone's *Once Upon A Time in the West* (1968) because of incompetence.

But in post-war Italian cinema, all dialogue – all sound – was overdubbed. The Italian industry standard was to shoot 'motor only', meaning just the picture. One theory is that motor-only shooting (MOS) took hold in Italian cinema in the wake of World War II because of a drought of decent (and functional) recording equipment. True or not, as time went on, the method was retained – why not simplify a shoot so that a director had only to think about light, framing, performance, leaving the sound of the film to be built in the controlled conditions of post-production? Tarkovsky is one example of a director who took advantage of the control offered, to sublime effect. The aesthetic of Italian cinema is very different; yet the effect of shooting without synchronised sound, adding dialogue later, works to uncanny advantage.

In the films of Michelangelo Antonioni, for instance, the disconnect between the face and the dialogue chimes with the characters' existential crises – when in *L'avventura* (1960) Anna (Lea Massari) slips her moorings, and Sandro (Gabriele Ferzetti) enters a near fugue state in his search for her. Or in *La notte* (1961), where the verbal mismatch, the gap between language and body language, underscores the hypocrisy and dishonesty of the faltering marriage of Giovanni (Marcello Mastroianni) and Lidia (Jeanne Moreau). The typical Antonioni character is alienated, adrift, detached from friends, family and society – hardly able to put their dialogue where their mouth is.

In Fellini's *The Clowns* (1970) the mixture of overdubbing and direct documentary sound is uneasy, but dubbed dialogue works fine in the psychedelic pantomime of his *Satyricon* (1969), chiming with the deep oddness of its staging and design. In *8½* (1963) the crosscurrents of dialogue and performance are an ideal reflection of Guido's own personal crisis. When late on he finds himself alone with Claudia Cardinale, Guido (Mastroianni) manages a moment of sincerity: "Could you drop everything to start a new life? Choose one thing, only one thing, and stick to it?" His mouth is in deep black shadow throughout. In *La Dolce Vita* (1960) MOS resonates with the rising distaste that Marcello (Mastroianni again) feels for the slick decadence of his milieu: the final scene has him helplessly signing a non-conversation with Paola, a young waitress with a simplicity and innocence he can no longer access. Fellini took full advantage of



(Clockwise from top left) *8½*, *Bicycle Thieves*, *L'avventura*, *Theorem*, *Rocco and His Brothers*, *La notte*

the separation of sound and motion capture, using it to rewrite and rework dialogue after the performance had been shot – not so much *esprit de l'escalier* as *esprit de l'editing suite*.

For Dario Argento, overdubbing provides less of a subliminally wrong undertow, more a wholesale mismatch between sound and picture, entirely in keeping with the lucid nightmare of his aesthetic. Working with multinational funding and multinational casts, Argento would typically have actors deliver the script on-set in their native language. So in *Suspiria* (1977), Jessica Harper's heroine Susy Bannion is speaking English to Udo Kier, who is speaking German, and Alida Valli, speaking Italian. For an actor, the knowledge that their verbal performance is going unrecorded can elicit a different performance: Harper once described it as requiring a silent-era style, in which the focus was entirely on the visual telegraphing of emotion and state of mind. Just as Argento cranks up his lurid colour schemes into luminous pinks, purples and scarlets, and the sound design to a hysterical pitch to match Goblin's score, so every line of dialogue reads wrong, regardless of the actor's delivery. It's a disturbing effect, the reality-gone-awry quality of which has been echoed

In Antonioni's films, the disconnect between the face and the dialogue chimes with the characters' existential crises

across horror's full spectrum – Dean Stockwell's deeply creepy Roy Orbison karaoke act in Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986) is a milder example.

How could these effects work in the tradition of Italian neorealism, though – its keynote being realism? Results are variable. In De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) the naturalism and magnetism of Lamberto Maggiorani and Enzo Staiola as father and son are such that the dubbing flows by unnoticed. In a film like Visconti's *Rocco and His Brothers* (1960), realism already under stress from the notion of 'pretty boy' Alain Delon as a boxing prodigy, it works less well. And yet: the Parondi brothers are southerners, recently transplanted to Italy's industrial north and slightly at sea, speaking a nearly different language. Again, dubbing provides a near-subconscious echo. An Italian-French production, *Rocco* features twin dialogue dubs, one for each market. Which should prevail? In Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* (1945), a founding text of Italian neorealism, MOS creates uncanny felicitous touches. The overdubbed effects are quickly apparent when, early in the film, a German patrol marches on to an apartment building roof in pursuit of a partisan; below, Anna Magnani's Pina chats to friends on the street. Not only the just-off synchronisation but the timbre of sound in these two scenes is audibly interior: a slight reverb giving away the scale of the room in which the sound was recorded. The wrongness, the error, pays off, making the point that this is no open city, but a closed, claustrophobic space – a city under occupation.

PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA



What is the link between early British talkies and goats' testicles? A new restoration makes the connection plain

By Geoff Brown

Every comprehensive book of film history should carry a footnote about John R. Brinkley. A fraudulent American doctor, he earned fame in the 1920s for boasting of curing male impotency by transplantation of a goat's private parts. When dialogue sequences were implanted into silent features, Hollywood's slang-makers called them 'goat-gland' movies. *Picturegoer* magazine introduced the term to the British public in March 1929, just in time for the production of the first British goat-glander, *Kitty*, a sentimental drama based on Warwick Deeping's 1927 novel about class conflict, stifling mother love and the lingering scars of World War I.

Victor Saville, the film's suave and ambitious director, was so keen to make his film talk that while his home base, British International Pictures at Elstree, awaited sound facilities of its own he arranged for a goat-gland operation to take place abroad. Work on the sound elements of the film began in late March at RCA's Gramercy studio on East 24th Street in Manhattan. The resident local team of technicians worked with Saville and the British actors John Stuart, Dorothy Cumming and Charles Levey (credited sometimes as O'Shaughnessy), all shipped over on the *Aquitania*, plus the American Estelle Brody as Kitty. While on the spot, Brody also appeared for Saville singing and dancing, with accompaniment from future jazz stars such as Benny Goodman, in a talkie one-reeler called *Me and the Boys* – a lost novelty now found, restored, and recently screened at the Capitolfest in Rome, New York.

I've been looking into *Kitty* recently for the AHRC-funded research project 'British Silent Cinema and the Transition to Sound', and the intricate clumsiness of its sound transplant sometimes defies belief. Synchronised dialogue arrives late in the film, reaching a peak in a key sequence in which humble Kitty and her paralysed husband nervously await the first customers at their refreshment business by the idyllic Thames. One shot brings lyrical silent location footage; in the next we're gasping for breath in a dull Manhattan studio interior. One of the most plausible British male silent stars, Stuart keeps repeating his banal lines as if he's unsure what the words mean ("Oh, my dear, my dear... Darling, I do need you, I do need you") – other films show that he soon improved. Levey, on the other hand, bubbles over with gusto, too much so in dialogue placed over silent images of his whiskery handyman Ruben tripping up with excitement. Jumping madly between silence and sound, old footage and new, the scene is a crazy technological patchwork.

A two-page spread in America's *Film Daily* prepared the ground for the film's US release; the reward was a stinking review in *Variety*: "Useless... looks as though it had come out of a foundling asylum... is there no-one



Estelle Brody and John Stuart in *Kitty*

Silent films were tottering: Edgar Wallace declared them 'dead as the magic lantern'

in England who knows anything at all about making moving pictures?" The reviewer, Sime Silverman, was seemingly unaware of New York's part in the proceedings, flat lighting and all.

British commentators treated the talking *Kitty* much more kindly and the film, quaint though it is, remains of interest. But by the time of its unveiling, early in June 1929, British talkies had moved on. During Saville's absence BIP had rigged up a makeshift studio from a props store, where Hitchcock made his talking *Blackmail*, a far more sophisticated film which immediately caught the world's attention following its trade premiere on 22 June. The world absorbed another lesson when a further BIP goat-glander, Arthur Robison's *The Informer*, emerged in October, to be pilloried for the awkward voices dubbed into the mouths of its foreign stars, Lars Hanson and Lya de Putti. The headline of the *Daily Mail* review told the whole story: 'Talk-Film That Ought to be Silent'. No wonder the BFI chose to recreate the silent version for its new restoration.

What with *Blackmail* and imported American talkies, *Kitty* itself was soon forgotten in Britain. Silent films were tottering: Edgar Wallace declared them "dead as the magic lantern". This was an exaggeration: as 1930 dawned many small British cinemas clung on without sound equipment, despite mounting anxiety about shrinking popularity. But economics sealed their fate: it was the large circuit cinemas that made the big money, and they did it by showing 100 per cent talkies. That's what the crowds came for – not for silents, nor for *Kitty* and other surgical patchworks that could only support the view of the German critic Rudolf Arnheim that silent/sound conversions were only possible for films with the status of "industrial waste": "A work of art," Arnheim pronounced, "is not a shirt with removable sleeves." Dr Brinkley, I presume, wouldn't concur. ☹

i *The Informer*, with a new score by Garth Knox, will be the BFI London Film Festival's Archive Gala on 14 October

In Pasolini's filmography, the slippage between overdubbed dialogue and onscreen performance works differently again. In *Salò: 120 Days of Sodom* (1975) it chimes with his disturbingly undramatic presentation of fascist violence, perpetrated by well-dressed, attractive young people as the veneer of civilisation begins to fade. There's an echo of Bertolt Brecht's alienation effects, deliberately flouting dramatic norms to trash the audience's bourgeois expectations of theatre. But a crucial sequence in Pasolini's *Theorem* (1968) comes after Terence Stamp's mysterious unnamed visitor has seduced every member of an Italian bourgeois family: they deliver heartfelt soliloquies explaining how his love has fulfilled and liberated them. The gap between their lip movements and the overdubbed dialogue is surreal; a word/mouth salad. *Theorem* actually starts with a sequence of synched sound, vox-pop footage of factory workers which harks back to Pasolini's *Love Meetings* (1964), a brilliant series of documentary conversations with Italians on the street about attitudes to sex, marriage and homosexuality. Elsewhere Pasolini uses MOS's subversive potential, but in *Theorem* he trusts overdubbing to carry sincere self-revelation. What words are being spoken by the actors (and replaced in post-production)? Would an Italian lip-reader recover earlier drafts of Pasolini's screenplay (and also Fellini's, Antonioni's, et al)? It raises the question, how many Italian films are we watching that are in effect palimpsests – the audio text overlaying the visual record of an earlier text, always before our eyes, yet stubbornly inaudible and illegible? ☹

SPLIT DECISIONS



Mysterious object: Alessandra Negrini in the Brazilian director Júlio Bressane's claustrophobic, philosophical-erotic *Beduíno*

Always daring, this year the Locarno festival pushed the boat out, with films that defied critical categories

By Kieron Corless

You often hear of films that divide critics into opposing camps, but what about ones that work similarly on the individual – putting him or her at odds with themselves, inducing a kind of baffled, panicky oscillation between endorsement and rejection? Perhaps those films belong to a rarer breed, destabilising by virtue of strangeness, or abstractness, or some completely new or unknown elements. A week after returning from Locarno, where I came upon two such films, I still can't make up my mind about either.

Locarno is a festival rightly lauded for adventurous programming across all its sections, but its artistic director Carlo Chatrjian mentioned to me in passing that these same two 'non-narrative' films represented something riskier than the norm in terms of their selection for the main competition. The one packing the greater punch was *The Dreamed Path* by the German director Angela Schanelec, her sixth feature. Schanelec has been loosely associated with the Berlin School, along with Christian Petzold and Christoph Hochhäusler, among others; but she is

arguably the most disposed of them all to ellipsis, sparseness and narrative mystery, seen to best effect in *Marseille* (2004). Her new film opens in Greece in 1984. Kenneth, a young Englishman, is travelling with his girlfriend Theres, but must return to England to minister to his dying mother, whereupon he loses touch with Theres. The film then surprisingly switches to Berlin 30 years later, focusing on Ariane, a TV actress who separates from her anthropologist husband. He takes a new flat overlooking the station, where the now homeless Kenneth begs for money. Since Theres also now lives in Berlin, will they meet again? And what if anything binds these two stories?

The thing you're instantly struck by is the degree to which the film is in dialogue with, even in thrall to, late Bresson, almost to the point of pastiche: through framing, lighting, the way people and objects are shot, and especially the impassive acting style. What is Schanelec up to? There are plenty of contemporary directors drawing sustenance from the Bressonian well (Pedro Costa, Bruno Dumont, the Dardennes, Eugène Green, to name but a few), but here it feels too thoroughgoing, too much in the service of a one-dimensional view of the world given over to misery and hopelessness. Where Bresson opened up his characters to a state of grace, here it felt as if they were being cornered, closed down. That said, the parts set in the UK early on are brilliantly defamiliarising; the

precision and control in every aspect of the *mise en scène* are staggering. And the scenes featuring children, particularly the couple's daughter, do mitigate to some small degree the prevailing bleakness. For all my misgivings, the film gets under your skin and stays there.

Anocha Suwichakornpong's second feature *By the Time It Gets Dark* is a real head-scratcher. It starts conventionally enough, with a young filmmaker interviewing an elderly writer about her experiences as a student activist during the period leading up to and after the 1976 student massacres, still a taboo subject in Thailand, the interview interpolated with fictionalised flashbacks to the period. It seems we're in for a slow-burning philosophical enquiry into how history is framed and represented, but then things take a curious turn. The filmmaker takes a trippy walk in the woods, a young worker on a tobacco farm transforms into a famous singer and actor, a waitress in the early scenes later becomes a cleaner, a nun, dances in a club... Eventually all this instability takes its toll on the actual image, which begins to pixellate and break down. A lot of this is exhilarating to watch, thanks to the fluidity of the editing and fluency of the direction, but hard to get a fix on thematically. You can't fault the ambition to tackle big themes in Thai history and politics, but I began to find it scattershot, occasionally precious. I'd happily watch it again, but for

now, at this stage of the pendulum's swing, I'd say it feels like less than the sum of its parts.

Ultimately the competition jury seemed to play it not so much safe as straight. You could see how a consensus might have formed around the Golden Leopard winner *Godless*, the first feature by Bulgarian Ralitz Petrova, a comparatively conventional tale about a nurse addicted to morphine who sells her elderly patients' ID cards to fraudsters (the nurse is played by Irena Ivanova, who richly deserved her Best Actor prize). The small-town Bulgaria it depicts is corrupt and morally bankrupt at every level, even among those apparently enforcing the law. Things start to unravel when one of the nurse's patients, a musician who was ill-treated under communism, decides to fight back against the theft of his identity. The film creates a convincingly downbeat, textured milieu and well-drawn characters, and even pulls off a supernatural ending that doesn't feel misplaced; but for all the directorial panache, its political and social critique began to feel a bit blunt and obvious.

I've been a fan of João Pedro Rodrigues ever since his mesmerising debut feature *O Fantasma* (2000), about a gay binman's nocturnal transformations in the oneirically rendered suburbs of Lisbon. Rodrigues was awarded the Best Director prize for his new film *The Ornithologist*, another tale of transformation, this time about a professional birdwatcher called Fernando who gets lost in the Portuguese wilderness and has a series of increasingly bizarre, heavily symbolic encounters, before shape-shifting into St Anthony of Padua, the Franciscan friar. It inevitably calls to mind Apichatpong, perhaps even Lisandro Alonso's *Jauja* (2014), but it's nowhere near as subtle or effortlessly atmospheric as those two – or, to be fair, as Rodrigues at his best.

For me there were two genuine discoveries at Locarno, one by a master in his seventies, the other by a relative newcomer. *The Future Perfect* won the First Feature award for Nele Wohlatz, a German living in Buenos Aires. It explores how language shapes identity. A teenage Chinese girl Xiaobin pitches up in the same city to join her family, who've already been there a while. She speaks not a word of Spanish, so enrolls in classes, starts work in a supermarket, meets an Indian boy with whom she starts a tentative relationship. We see her gradually transform, developing and discovering a new self as her language proficiency improves, her classmates functioning as a kind of Greek chorus. It's another film clearly indebted to Bresson, an interesting contrast with the Schanelec; every bit as distilled and rigorous and conceptual, but occasionally funny, lighter, somehow more rounded.

Júlio Bressane's *Beduíno* is a claustrophobic two-hander, a philosophical-erotic *pas de deux* between a couple enacting a series of roles in a heightened register. Apart from short segments shot on a woodland path, the film takes place in expressively lit hothouse interiors. Dialogue is dense and lyrical, the acting style declamatory, with a desperate edge to their exchanges. These intense encounters are punctuated at perfectly judged intervals by black-and-white footage from an earlier Bressane film, showing a woman



Hopeless misery: Miriam Jakob as Theres in *The Dreamed Path*

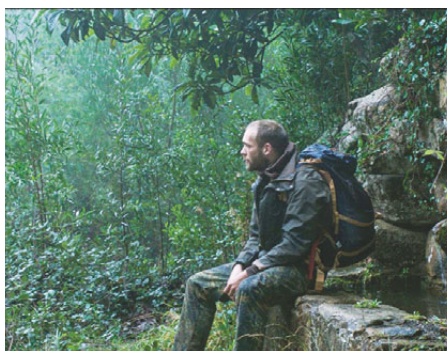
Schanelec's 'The Dreamed Path' is in dialogue with, even in thrall to, late Bresson, almost to the point of pastiche

on a boat rocking gently on the waves, which provides a kind of respite and breathing space for the viewer. It's a mysterious object all right, and certainly a single late-night viewing felt like barely scratching the surface; but no other film I saw in Locarno had anything like its combination of poetic density, craftsmanship, sensuality – a magical conjuring on such an obvious low budget. Let's hope there's a retrospective of Bressane's films in the UK soon, so we can finally begin to grapple properly with this fascinating and overlooked Brazilian maestro.

From divided critic to divided nation: every year Locarno hosts a massive retrospective, usually of a major director and screened in 35mm, but this time it was a survey of German cinema from 1949-63, the Adenauer era. Received wisdom is that this period produced an anodyne cinema of genre fare, reflecting the Adenauer government's agenda of looking forward rather than confronting the horrors of the recent past – a kind of dead time before the Oberhausen Manifesto ushered in the wonders of the New German

cinema. Here, curators Roberto Turigliatto and Olaf Möller argued against that version of history, assembling films from both sides of a divided Germany, including animation, documentaries, avant-garde/experimental work, even advertising and public information films. Judging by the films' quality (I managed to see ten or so of the 80-odd) and the excited buzz the retrospective generated, they'd made a strong case. I was grateful for the enlightening introductions to the films in English too, which fleshed out fascinating production backstories and historical contexts.

Of the features, you could see how a genre piece like *Vom Teufel gejagt* (1950) by Viktor Tourjansky – a Jekyll-and-Hyde story set in a clinic for the mentally ill whose chief clinician develops a drug, tested illegally on himself, that allows him to control his patients – might have been dismissed by snootier highbrow critics. Not hard to spot the allegory, by all means, but the skill and conviction with which it was executed and the queasy atmosphere of moral murk and palpable guilt gave the material considerable potency. My personal favourite was *Spotkania w mroku* (*Meeting in the Dusk*, 1959), a Polish/GDR co-production directed by a Polish woman, Wanda Jakubowska. An Auschwitz survivor, Jakubowska was also the first director to shoot a fiction feature (*Last Stage*, 1947) in the notorious death camp, based on her own experiences. *Spotkania w mroku* is told in flashback by a successful Polish concert pianist, who after the war revisits the (fictional) town in Germany where she and numerous compatriots had been transported as slave labour. This was the first film in Germany to refer to the camps as what they actually were, extermination camps – something that could never have happened in a West German film at that time. Similarly, the film's ending exposed certain continuities from the Nazi era – but in West Germany. Such ideological cross-currents and pregnant subtexts, evident in so many of the films, kept drawing me back to the retrospective, the cumulative fascination it exerted making it the highlight of another notable Locarno edition. 🍷



João Pedro Rodrigues's *The Ornithologist*

The Masters of Cinema Series

FEDORA

For his penultimate film, **Billy Wilder** created this elegiac, potent and richly entertaining mystery. Reuniting with one of his greatest actors **William Holden**, and co-written with his longtime collaborator **I.A.L. Diamond**, this is an exquisitely crafted tale of romance and intrigue.

Available on DVD and Blu-ray for the first time in the UK, September 2016.

AVAILABLE FROM
amazon.co.uk

EUREKA!
www.mastersofcinema.org

 @mastersofcinema
@eurekavideo



“A FUSION OF **SENSUALITY, TENDERNESS** AND **SOUL-SEARCHING**”

ERIC KOHN, INDIEWIRE

★★★★★ THE SKINNY
★★★★★ CULTURE WHISPER

“**RADIANT, HEARTFELT...
AN IRRESISTIBLE ENERGY**”

ALLAN HUNTER, SCREEN DAILY

“**GORGEOUS...
EMOTIONALLY CHARGED
MELODRAMA**”

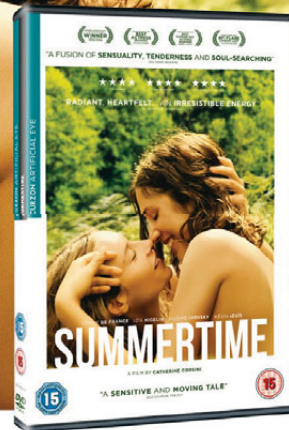
ANDREW MCARTHUR, THE PEOPLE'S MOVIES



CÉCILE DE FRANCE IZÏA HIGELIN NOÉMIE LVOVSKY KÉVIN AZAÏS

SUMMERTIME

A FILM BY CATHERINE CORSINI



AVAILABLE ON DVD 12 SEPTEMBER

Available At
amazon.co.uk

Free Super Saver Delivery and Unlimited One-Day Delivery with Amazon Prime are available. Terms and Conditions apply. See Amazon.co.uk for details. Amazon, the Amazon logo and Amazon.co.uk are registered trademarks of Amazon EU SARL or its affiliates.

CURZON
ARTIFICIAL EYE

Reviews



70 **The Blue Room**

Mathieu Amalric's film wears its cinephilia lightly but distinctly. The provincial crime theme suggests Chabrol, while the Bernard Herrmann-like soaring melodramatic music inevitably evokes Hitchcock



58 Films of the Month



66 Films



96 Home Cinema



104 Books

Baden Baden

France/Belgium 2015

Director: Rachel Lang

Certificate 15 95m 21s

See interview
on page 9

Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley

Rachel Lang's debut feature opens with a five-minute shot filmed through the passenger window of a car, the camera trained on the increasingly panicked face of the young woman driving. She swears and takes a call. She is, we gradually realise, an assistant on a film, late delivering the high-profile star to set. Arriving, she is hauled out of the car and given one hell of a dressing-down by the production manager, and we wait, at a distance, until she returns snivelling to her driver's seat. Framed by the thick black lines of the car window, she sheds a solitary tear, before jamming the vehicle into gear.

This distinctive opening sets the tone for an episodic drama that follows in the tradition of Eric Rohmer's *The Green Ray* (1986), Mia Hansen-Løve's *Goodbye First Love* (2011) and Julie Lopes-Curval's *High Society* (2014), tracing a young woman's existential and romantic coming of age (which seems to happen a lot later these days) over the course of a single summer. When the film has wrapped, 26-year-old Ana (Salomé Richard), whose peripatetic lifestyle has led her most recently to London, drives the production's flashy hire car all the way to her hometown of Strasbourg, where she pinballs around between various lovers and her grandmother's rundown apartment with apparently very little idea of what she is doing or where she'll go next. Craving something of substance, she sets about renovating the apartment's tired bathroom, smashing tiles and heaving fixtures with the help of hapless DIY-store salesman Grégoire, whom she picks up during a shopping trip (such is Ana's wont). As she pivots and turns, moving in every direction but going nowhere, we wait to see if and where she will land.

Baden Baden is the final film in a trilogy, the first two parts of which – Lang's shorts *For You I Will Fight* (2011 winner of the Silver Leopard at Locarno) and *White Turnips Make It Hard to Sleep* (2011) – also starred Richard as Ana. Lang has said little about any autobiographical connection, but it's intriguing that both Ana (in *For You I Will Fight*) and Lang have served as officers in the French army. Worth noting, too, that Lang grew up in Strasbourg, Alsace, an area that, having been at various points annexed by Germany and briefly declared a republic, has suffered its own share of identity crises. Here she makes surprising use of the city and its architecture, using a bleached palette with vivid splashes of primary colour. Cinematographer Fiona Braillon tends to shoot head-on or at right angles, carving the space into parallel and perpendicular lines. At one moment, Ana is captured before an endless stack of apartment balconies, at another in front of a grid of blue tiles lining an empty pool. Even a hulking DIY megastore offers moments of unusual beauty among a hothouse array of showerheads.

There's something rather deadpan about this flattening out that puts one in mind of Aki Kaurismäki, for example. And indeed, the film is frequently funny, in a dry, witty manner. Claude Gensac delivers some knockout one-liners as Ana's curmudgeonly grandmother Odette, while Lazare Gousseau's slapstick wrangling with a



Coming home: Salomé Richard (far right) as Ana in Rachel Lang's frequently funny drama

bathtub is worthy of Laurel and Hardy. There's a hilarious drunken scene in a nearly empty karaoke bar. Yet the atmosphere is mostly languid, sultry, even at times fairytale-like. We catch brief glimpses of Ana and artist lover Boris strolling naked through a forest that are perhaps a fantasy. At the film's climax, Ana travels down a winding road and arrives at Le Corbusier's Notre Dame

It's a film that uses both humour and lyricism to ask questions – sometimes uncomfortable ones – about what it is to be a young woman today



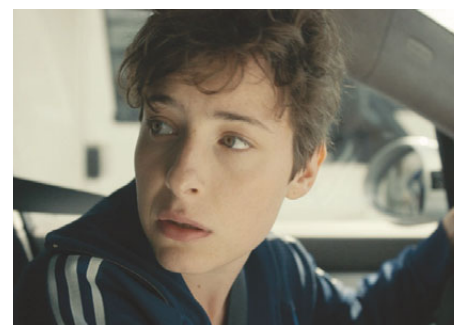
24 showers a day: Ana with Grégoire, played by Lazare Gousseau



du Haut chapel, a kind of concrete gingerbread house. At these moments, time stutters, becomes dreamlike, Brailon's camera slowing down and speeding up almost imperceptibly. The tonal shifts could have jarred; instead they feel elegant, organic, thanks in no small part to some clever editing by Sophie Vercruysse.

Present in almost every scene, Richard carries the weight of the film. An androgynous figure, crop-headed, hairy of armpit and leg, clad even at a funeral in loose-fitting cut-off jeans and vest, she has the mournful yet impish air of a Pierrot. It's surely no coincidence that she bears a striking resemblance to Lang – the Jean-Pierre Léaud to her François Truffaut. Nor that she looks much more like her male lovers (played by Swann Arlaud and Olivier Chantreau as puppyish boy-men) than her long-haired, heavy-chested female friends Meriem and Mira. To a certain extent, then, *Baden Baden* plays with gender norms. But at the same time, the burden of anatomical femaleness is made visually explicit – as Ana squats to pee, watches her unborn foetus writhe on an ultrasound, or faces confusion over exactly which hole to put a pessary in.

Lang's film has a timely feel. I can think of numerous current academic projects to do with female subjectivity and queer identity that might make use of it, and it certainly passes the Bechdel test with flying colours. It sits alongside Rachel Tunnard's *Adult Life Skills* (2016), Desiree



Richard as Ana

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Jérémy Forni
Pierre-Louis Cassou
Joseph Rouschop
Valérie Bournonville

Screenplay

Rachel Lang

Director of Photography

Fiona Brailon

Editor

Sophie Vercruysse

Art Director

Jean-François Sturm

Sound Recordist

Aline Huber
Costumes
Sandra Campisi

©Chevaldeutrois,
Tarantula, RTBF

Production Companies

Produced by
Chevaldeutrois
and Tarantula in

co-production with

RTBF (Télévision

Belge), Proximus

With the support

of Centre National

du Cinéma et de

l'Image Animée,

Centre du Cinéma

et de l'Audiovisuel

de la Fédération

Wallonie-Bruxelles,

VOO, Agence

Culturelle d'Alsace,
Région Alsace,

Eurométropole

de Strasbourg

In partnership with

CNC, Wallonie, Région

de Bruxelles-Capitale

With the participation

of Ciné+, Jour2Fête

Produced with the

support of Tax Shelter

du Gouvernement

Fédéral Belge

In association with

Artémis Productions,

Tax Shelter Films

Funding, Cinéfinance

Tax Shelter

Developed with

the support of

Programme MEDIA

de la Communauté

Européenne

In collaboration with

Bureau d'Accueil

des Tournages de la

Région Alsace and

Bureau d'Accueil

des Tournages de

l'Eurométropole

de Strasbourg

Lazare Gousseau

Grégoire

Swann Arlaud

Simon

Olivier Chantreau

Boris

Jorijn Vriesendorp

Mira

Noémie Rosset

Meriem

Driss Ramdi

Amar

Thomas Silberstein

Samson

Zabou Breitman

Ana's mother

Sam Louwyck

Andrew

Kate Moran

Lois

Kris Portier

de Bellair

Boris's mother

Régis Lang

Ana's father

Strasbourg, the present. After an unsuccessful stint working as a production assistant, 26-year-old Ana has returned to her hometown with the production's rented Porsche. She stays in the rundown apartment of her grandmother, Odette, while her parents are on holiday, and catches up with her brother Samson and her old friends Simon and Meriem, who awkwardly pass on the latest news of ex-boyfriend Boris, an up-and-coming artist.

After a nasty fall lands Odette in hospital, Ana undertakes to renovate her bathroom with the help of amateur handyman Grégoire, whom she meets in a DIY store. During an overnight trip, she has sex with Simon. Later, she bumps into Boris, who invites her to dinner. The pair resume their tense relationship, much to the

concern of Ana's friends and family. Ana is arrested for speeding and loses her licence and the rental car. Frustrated at her slow progress with the bathroom, she approaches apprentice tiler Amar and asks him to help, but he refuses. Grégoire makes a pass at Ana, but she rebuffs him. Boris wins a fellowship that will take him abroad. Ana attends a doctor's clinic to confirm a suspected pregnancy. Despite the doctor's cajoling, she books an abortion. Odette dies, leaving Ana distraught. Ana bumps into Amar, who tells her that he is leaving for the Foreign Legion. She drives him to see Le Corbusier's Notre Dame du Haut chapel before he leaves, and tells him that both he and the building give her strength.

The film closes with a shot of the finished bathroom, alight with sparklers.

Akhavan's *Appropriate Behaviour* (2014) and Gillian Robespierre's *Obvious Child* (2014) as a film that uses both humour and lyricism to ask questions – sometimes uncomfortable ones – about what it is to be a young woman today. It's perhaps more appropriate, though, to bracket Lang alongside the artist/director Clément Cogitore, also from Alsace (whose 2012 work 'The Dark Knight' features in *Baden Baden* and whose *The Wakhan Front* showed at Cannes 2015), and Richard herself as one of a group of young French filmmakers making perplexing, hypnotic works that feel genuinely fresh. Everything you need to know about one young man's feelings for Ana is shown in the way he thoughtlessly wanders in and out of shot as they Skype. Everything you need to know about her feelings for him lies in the taut rigidity of her shoulders as she waits, still as a painting, for him to finish another call.

Elliptical in the extreme, full of gaps into which our imagination first seeps then rushes, *Baden Baden* requires a certain amount of patience from the viewer, but richly repays it. It's testament to Lang's intelligent, assured direction that the film feels like the early work of a great talent. At the end, one character gives the tiniest – *tiniest* – shake of the head, and encapsulated in this gesture, which is almost not there, is all the mystery and weirdness and promise of Lang's stunning debut. If for one can't wait to see what she does next.

The Girl with All the Gifts

United Kingdom/USA 2016

Director: Colm McCarthy

Certificate 15 110m 53s

See
Development
Tale, page 16

Reviewed by Nikki Baughan

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

The possibility that humanity's destruction may come by our own hand has long

fascinated filmmakers, and the flesh-eating zombie, having long left behind its origins in voodoo, has become the idea's most popular embodiment. Horror cinema is an acute social barometer: one generation of movies – beginning with George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* in 1968 – was informed by the advance of chemical warfare and the civil rights revolution, its undead prowling a familiar, contemporary landscape. Similarly, post-9/11 paranoia has seen a zombie resurgence on an international scale, beginning with Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later...* in 2002 and taking in the likes of American TV hit *The Walking Dead*, Spanish horror franchise *[REC]*, Cuban effort *Juan of the Dead* (2011) and this year's South Korean hit *Train to Busan*.

So it is with *The Girl with All the Gifts* – not a zombie movie in the traditional sense but visceral, intelligent horror inspired by our increasingly fragile grip on the world. The film's gore-soaked narrative, about a highly contagious fungal infection that turns victims into braindead flesh-eaters (its fast-moving creatures more closely related to Boyle's rage-fuelled crazies than Romero's shuffling deadheads), taps directly into current fears about man's inhumanity to man, the rapid evolution of disease and the devastating effects of environmental change.

Screenwriter Mike Carey, adapting his own 2014 dystopian novel, throws us immediately into the fray. In a dark cell, a young girl (Sennia Nanua) in a Guantánamo Bay-style orange jumpsuit straps herself carefully into a wheelchair. She greets the armed guards who enter with cheer, even as they speak in language that is cold and coarse. This, we learn, is Melanie; she remains upbeat as her captors wheel her and several other happily secured children to a classroom. It's an uncomfortable, disorienting opening, intensified by the cacophonous, pulsing soundtrack, which is used to great effect throughout the film.

Indeed, *The Girl with All the Gifts* is deliberately disorienting, particularly for those with no knowledge of the book. There's no backstory or explanation of time and place – other than the clues of modern clothing and Midlands accents – or of the events that have led to this point. We are dropped into the action and expected to keep up; characters enter, things (often bizarre) happen and we must piece together the story as it moves at a breathless pace. It's an exhilarating experience, augmented by intimate, immersive cinematography from Simon Dennis, whose camera remains unflinchingly close to the action throughout.

Brief respite comes in the calmer form of teacher Helen (Gemma Arterton), who has a genuine affection for her charges. When she moves too near to Melanie, however, Sergeant Eddie Parks (Paddy Considine) bursts into the classroom, inexplicably licks his arm and holds it under the nose of the nearest child. Within seconds, the boy becomes dead-eyed and starts snapping his jaw, desperate to sink his teeth into Eddie's flesh; immediately, the other children follow suit. Melanie watches, sharing our horror; although it is clear that she must be similarly afflicted, it's equally clear that she didn't know it. This revelation of her true nature kickstarts her journey to self-awareness, and self-acceptance.

Melanie has a love of Greek mythology – which turns out to be a heavy-handed way of alerting the viewer to the film's subtext. The title is a translation of the Greek name 'Pandora': Hesiod's Pandora was the first woman, moulded from clay by angry gods to bear a line of descendants to torment mankind. Similarly, Melanie is one of the first of a new breed. She was conceived naturally but contracted the zombie virus from her mother *in utero*; as a result her bloodlust is balanced by cognitive function, advanced intellect and, crucially, compassion. She is both recognisably human and terrifyingly monstrous, and by sharp turns will inspire sympathy, disgust and abject fear.

This is not a zombie movie in the traditional sense, but visceral, intelligent horror inspired by our increasingly fragile grip on the world



Food chain: Glenn Close, Gemma Arterton, Paddy Considine and Fisayo Akinade

This last comes when the military base is overrun by a swarm of 'hungries' – humans who are infected with the virus and unlike Melanie are overwhelmed by their cannibalistic impulses – and Melanie has her first taste of human flesh while saving Helen's life. The pair escape with Parks, scientist Dr Caroline Caldwell (Glenn Close) and officers Dillon (Anthony Welsh) and Kieran (Fisayo Akinade), heading south to a secure enclave known as the Beacon. When they reach London, the film diverges from tradition, presenting the infected not as shambling anthropoids but as something entirely naturalistic. Alone, the creatures remain rooted to the spot like trees, even swaying gently in the breeze, but the moment they detect the faintest whiff of pheromones – which surviving humans try to cover up with blocking gel – they come immediately to rabid life, woken by the need to feed.

Other instincts are also at play. An infected woman pushes a buggy, driven by a lingering maternal urge that fascinates Dr Caldwell and resonates with the others. While no character besides Melanie is given an explicit backstory, it is safe to assume that all have suffered loss. Helen's intimacy with Melanie is palpably maternal, particularly when contrasted with Dr Caldwell's scientific interest; and Parks's final-reel revelation about his own family adds retrospective poignancy to his interactions with Melanie.

Mother Nature has a crucial role too. The virus is vehemently aggressive, impervious to human science and advancing to a state where the earliest infected are turning into huge fungal plants – one of which has climbed the BT Tower. These contain multitudes of pods, ticking organic time bombs whose spores, when released, will send the virus unstoppably airborne.

From here, the film beats an intriguing path. As Sgt Parks increasingly places trust in Melanie, charging her with navigating through the hungries, the balance of power begins to shift. At first, this trust is rewarded by loyalty, Melanie sating her bloodlust with animals and saving her companions from a group of feral children – hungry/human hybrids like her but without social influence, a pack of wild animals. The sequence in which a snarling Melanie beats their leader to death, while simultaneously issuing calm instructions to Sgt Parks and Helen, is the film's most powerful, the terrifying enactment of Freud's concept of the uncanny.

In the demanding role of Melanie, newcomer Nanua gives an impressively natural, nuanced performance. She embodies a childlike innocence and exuberance: in her prison home she revels in human contact; later, experiencing freedom, she finds utter joy in the mechanics of a cat flap, the act of opening and closing a door. This gives way to horror, then purpose, as she comes to understand her destiny. Though firmly in Nanua's orbit, Arterton, Close and Considine are all excellent; they clearly relish the freshness and complexity of the material. For director Colm McCarthy, this second feature is a return to familiar territory – the horror landscape of his 2010 feature debut *Outcast*, which combined Irish traveller mythologies about a vicious beast with the tale of a devoted mother determined to protect her son. Since that film, McCarthy has honed his craft on cinematic TV shows such as *Sherlock* and *Peaky Blinders*, which similarly revolve around



The hunger games: Sennia Nanua as Melanie, one of the first of a new breed which is both human and terrifyingly monstrous

troubled characters forced to confront the darkest elements of society, and of themselves.

Thematic similarities with *The Girl with All the Gifts* are striking, and this familiar ground gives McCarthy the sureness of step to tackle both the horrific and dramatic aspects of his story without succumbing to schlock or melodrama. He also draws eloquently on myriad sources of genre inspiration; the physical transformation from human to hungry is reminiscent of John Landis's *An American Werewolf in London* (1981); the muzzle Melanie wears brings to mind Hannibal Lecter; a plant-ravaged London recalls *The Day of the Triffids*, and so on.

Despite the striking visuals – the military base overwhelmed by zombies, the crowds of silent hungries converging by decaying shopfronts (a neat nod to Romero's 1978 *Dawn of the Dead*), the fungus-covered London skyline – the lingering power of the film comes from Carey's story, its universal impact resonating through Melanie's intimate journey to self-enlightenment. She is such an endearing character that it's impossible not to root for her survival; the realisation of what this means in human terms is the film's devastating final blow. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Camille Gatin
Angus Lamont
Written by
Mike Carey
based on the novel
by M.R. Carey [i.e.,
Mike Carey]
**Director of
Photography**
Simon Dennis
Editor
Matthew Cannings
Production Designer
Kristian Milsted
Music

Cristobal Tapia de Veer
Sound Recordist
Will Whale
Costume Designer
Liza Bracey
Visual Effects
Automatik VFX
Stunt Co-ordinators
Mark Mottram
Mark Southworth

©Gift Girl Limited/The
British Film Institute
**Production
Companies**
Warner Bros.

Pictures presents
a BFI and Creative
England production
in association
with Altitude Film
Entertainment
A Poison Chef
production
Regional Growth
Fund, European Union
European Regional
Development Fund
Executive Producers
Lizzie Franke
Ben Roberts
Richard Holmes

Christopher Moll
Will Clarke
Andy Mayson
Mike Runagall

Cast

Gemma Arterton
Helen Justineau
Glenn Close
Dr Caroline Caldwell
Paddy Considine
Sergeant Eddie Parks
Sennia Nanua
Melanie
Dominique Tipper

Devani
Fisayo Akinade
Kieran Gallagher
Anthony Welsh
Dillon
Anamaria Marinca
Dr Jean Selkirk
Grace McGee
Anne
Eli Lane
Kenny
Connor Pratt
Peter
Joseph Lomas
Joe

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Warner Bros. Pictures
International (UK)

The Midlands, the near future. In a military facility, armed guards enter the cell of a young girl, Melanie, strap her into a wheelchair and take her to a classroom, where she and her similarly bound classmates are schooled by kind-hearted teacher Helen Justineau. When Helen moves too near to Melanie, Sgt Eddie Parks enters, licks his arm and wafts it under the nose of the nearest child, who immediately transforms into a jaw-snapping 'hungry' – the colloquial term for a victim of a widespread fungal infection that turns the afflicted into fast-moving zombies. When the base is overrun by a swarm of hungries, Sgt Parks and Helen escape with

Melanie, fellow soldiers Dillon and Kieran and scientist Dr Caroline Caldwell. Caldwell believes that Melanie, a human/hungry hybrid who has retained cognitive function and compassion, is the key to an antidote, but Helen vows to protect her. Reaching London, the survivors discover that packs of feral human/hybrid children are roaming the streets, and that some of the infected are turning into giant fungus plants whose pods contain viral spores. Caldwell tries to convince Melanie to sacrifice herself for the human race, but instead Melanie escapes and sets light to the plants, so sending the virus airborne and sealing humanity's fate.



Exquisite corpse: Daniel Radcliffe plays a dead body that washes ashore on a remote island where Paul Dano's castaway is preparing to commit suicide

Swiss Army Man

USA 2016

Directors: Daniel Scheinert, Daniel Kwan

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

There may be no more evocative pairing in American cinema than Warren Oates's Bennie and his silently mouldering travelling partner in Sam Peckinpah's dusty classic *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia* (1974). The spectacle of a battered gunslinger lovingly lugging around the decapitated dome of a deceased bandit sits at the intersection of existentialism and exploitation, just around the corner from Hamlet in the graveyard. It's an exquisitely sick joke that gets funnier and creepier as the movie goes on. Are Bennie's one-way conversations with the late Alfredo a sign of encroaching madness, or is he simply more in touch with his fatalism than his rivals are? And when it comes right down to it, aren't we all dead men walking?

Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia isn't, though, one of the films that has been mentioned in relation to the Sundance-fêted indie *Swiss Army Man*. Critics have typically cited more

mainstream films such as Ted Kotcheff's *Weekend at Bernie's* (1989) or Robert Zemeckis's *Cast Away* (2000), both of which make perfect sense as reference points. Like *Weekend at Bernie's*, *Swiss Army Man* is a buddy comedy in which one of the buddies is a dead body; like *Cast Away*, it's set in a remote location that becomes a crucible for a stranded character's physical survival and emotional growth. But even if Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert's feature debut is more obviously indebted to these later movies – as well as a host of other filmic and literary sources, ranging from *Robinson Crusoe* to the collected works of Wes Anderson – it has at least a little of Peckinpah's morbid gravity tethering down its frequent flights of fancy. The film is over the top and grounded at the same time.

Swiss Army Man opens on frail, emaciated Hank (Paul Dano) as he constructs a makeshift gallows on a deserted beach, fully intent on committing suicide – until a body washes ashore and piques his curiosity enough to put his suicide attempt on hold. The juxtaposition of a man (literally) at the end of his rope and the soggy, dishevelled cadaver suddenly caught in his line of sight is striking: it indicates that the first-time filmmakers orchestrating the scene have cleverness to

spare. The conceit of a corpse that inadvertently saves a life is authentically poetic. But then the body begins emitting gurgling post-mortem flatulence and Hank, in the throes of either a hardwired survival instinct or dim memories of old *MacGyver* episodes, tries to ride the wake left by these emissions, motor-boat-style, back to civilisation. Five minutes in and the fart jokes are going full throttle. The question of exactly what kind of movie the directors think they're making – or maybe what sort of movie we think we're watching – starts to feel uncertain, to say the least.

Not in a bad way, mind you. At a moment when the majority of American comedies either settle on a single tone and hunker down for the duration (eg, the sitcom melancholy of Judd Apatow or the bohemian ditziness of Noah Baumbach) or struggle to locate one (pretty much everything else), *Swiss Army Man*'s mix of sobriety and silliness is largely invigorating. The richest wellspring of surprise is Daniel Radcliffe's performance as Hank's corpse-companion Manny, combining as it does inspired flesh-and-blood physical comedy – drooping limbs and dead-eyed facial paralysis – with special-effects-enhanced superpowers that seemingly bring the story into the realm of fantasy. The film's



Most American comedies either settle on a single tone or struggle to locate one, so the mix of sobriety and silliness here is invigorating

title refers to Manny's apparently boundless abilities to generate the tools and resources (including a steady reservoir of fresh water) that Hank needs to stay alive; in exchange, Hank will help Manny, who gradually regains the power of speech, to remember everything he's forgotten about the time before his demise.

Of course, Hank's attempts to educate Manny about earthly delights reawakens his own lust for life; that the reference points for this sentimental education are porno magazines and *Jurassic Park* (John Williams's score is hummed reverently) only reinforces *Swiss Army Man* as a movie that emanates from deep inside a millennial male headspace. (Here the young directors show their age; the writer's-workshop chestnut – write what you know – comes to mind). This comedy of pop-culture recognition is more complex than it might have been, however, especially in a long set piece – exceptionally well edited by Matthew Hannam – in which Hank, under the guise of teaching Manny about talking to girls, dresses as the young woman whose digital snap adorns his cellphone screen. Guiding Manny to act more like him while he simultaneously plays the girl of his dreams, Hank becomes the author and object of his own desire.

The contrast between Hank, who is alive but physically feeble, and Manny, who is dead but biologically potent (his rigor-mortised penis acts as a divining rod), hints at a bisected masculinity, which is further fractured by flashes of explicitly homoerotic imagery (including a submerged kiss straight out of *Waterworld*). *Swiss Army Man* isn't coy about this subtext: if there's a thematic throughline here, it's the acknowledgement – and also the potential amelioration – of embarrassment in terms of the body and its urges, which extends to sexuality. Manny's brainless physicality is a form of torment – he's a cipher – but it also carries a sense of liberation: in his zombified state, he's incapable of overthinking things.

Hank's yearning for that kind of comfort in his own skin is achingly well acted by Dano, whose work here as an inverted nerd signifies beyond simple typecasting. If Dano has a flaw as an actor, it's a tendency to exaggerate psychological fragility – in films such as *12 Years a Slave* (2013) and *Love & Mercy* (2014), he seems to be striving for a transcendent weakness. Here, he takes a character who is already past his breaking point and gradually builds him back up into a figure of quiet dignity, which

gives the later passages, describing a return to civilisation, an unexpected emotional kick.

It's the willingness of all the major parties – the two directors and their stars – to risk ridiculousness that puts *Swiss Army Man* over the top. Almost every scene in this very carefully constructed movie can be read two ways, but Hank's final exchange with Manny, which returns them to the sort of beachfront setting where they initiated their friendship, has an especially jagged double edge.

Whether or not one concludes that Hank and Manny are finally two sides of the same person, their parting is suffused with melancholy and catharsis. And whether one reads *Swiss Army Man* as a movie about the acceptance or defiance of death, the way that it retains its conceptual spaciousness in the midst of so much audiovisual clutter is impressive. If *Swiss Army Man* is occasionally annoying, it is not a case of rookie directors letting their imaginations run away with them. The film is not simply undisciplined: rather, it questions the efficacy of discipline as an end in itself; that may not be an original question but it is still worth asking, especially in the form of a gently absurdist, unapologetically twee crowd-pleaser. That the last shots find a way to visually quote Jean-Jacques Rousseau amid a final flurry of flatulence is some kind of achievement anyway. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Lawrence Inglee
Jonathan Wang
Miranda Bailey
Amanda Marshall

Producers
Eyal Rimmeron
Lauren Mann

Written by
Daniel Scheinert
Daniel Kwan

Director of Photography
Larkin Seiple

Editor
Matthew Hannam

Production Designer
Jason Kisvarday

Music
Andy Hull
Robert McDowell

Production Sound Mixer
Stephen Nelson

Costume Designer
Stephani Lewis

@Ironworks
Productions, LLC
Production Companies
Tadmor and Astrakan
Film AB present a
Cold Iron Pictures
and Blackbird
Films production
in association
with Company 3 &
Method Studios

A film by Daniels
Supported by
the Sundance
Institute Feature
Film Program
and Fund and by
a grant from the
Sundance Institute/
HP Fellowship

Produced with
assistance from
the Dolby Family
Sound Fellowship

Executive Producers

Gideon Tadmor
Jim Kaufman
William Olsson

Cast

Paul Dano
Hank
Daniel Radcliffe
Manny
Mary Elizabeth Winstead
Sarah
Antonia Ribero
Crissie
Timothy Eulich
Preston
Richard Cross
Hank's dad

Dolby Atmos
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Picturehouse
Entertainment

A desert island, the present. Castaway Hank prepares to commit suicide but stops when he sees a body wash up on the beach in front of him. He manages to use the body, which is emitting post-mortem flatulence, as a jet ski to get back to the mainland, but he is still far from civilisation and on the brink of starvation. He names the body Manny and begins to talk to him, and in time Manny starts responding – though he still claims that he's dead. For some reason, Manny's erect penis acts as a compass, guiding them back to the city, so Hank devises a plan to keep Manny aroused by showing him photographs of a woman named Sarah, telling him she might have been his wife while he was alive. Hank and Manny have a series of adventures in the forest, culminating in a fight with a bear. Hank is injured, and Manny – who is heartbroken to realise that Sarah is Hank's crush and not his lover – drags him the rest of the way home. Hank and Manny reach Sarah's house; the police arrive and try to figure out what to make of this bizarre situation. Hank is arrested as a stalker when the police find pictures of Sarah on his phone, but he still makes it to the beach to say goodbye to Manny and watch him float away, once again propelled by his own flatulence.



True romance: Paul Dano as Hank and Daniel Radcliffe as Manny



Positive vibes: François Nambot and Geoffrey Couët as Hugo and Théo

Théo and Hugo

France 2016

Directors: Olivier Ducastel, Jacques Martineau
Certificate 18 96m 57s

Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

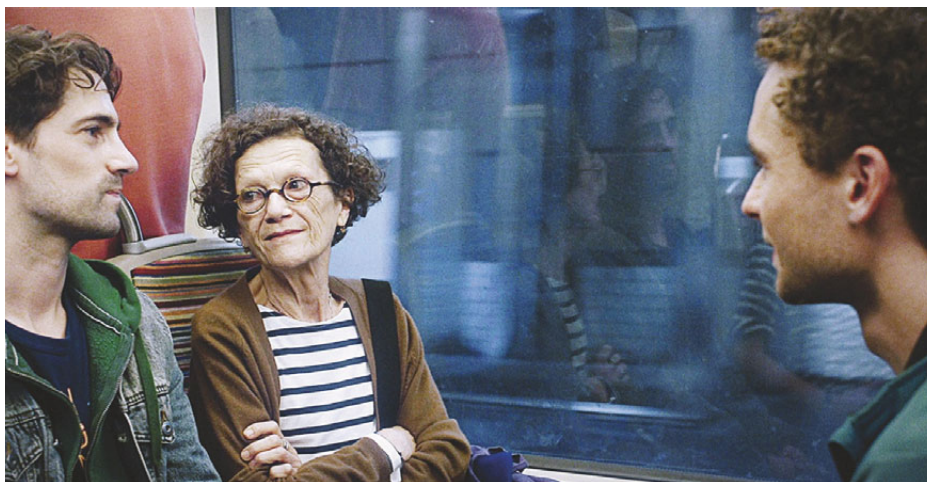
When Théo and Hugo finally reach the former's small apartment in Paris's 9th arrondissement after a night on the town, the main piece of decor in the frame is a poster: the art deco graphic of a face, half-obscured, with the legend '*La fumée irrite aussi vos yeux*' – 'smoke also gets in your eyes'. Théo is an industrial designer, and this elegant image is testament to the film's own purpose: beautiful and beguiling, it simultaneously offers a strikingly contemporary love story and a public-health service. Just as the poster finds a formally rigorous aesthetic for its anti-smoking message, alluding to a classic love song in the process, so *Théo and Hugo* tells its tale of one night out in Paris through a combination of formal precision, urgent information and a twist on the classic love story.

From anonymous sex at a gay cruising club, to dawn declarations of love, via emergency HIV-prevention medication, Théo and Hugo take the viewer on a ride through contemporary sexuality and desire, highlighting the persistence of the HIV/Aids crisis without moralising or catastrophising. Instead, the possibility of

infection and its ramifications – Hugo is positive, Théo is negative, they had unprotected sex – are presented as a fact of life (something that was argued recently during the UK court case over NHS funding for PrEP HIV-prevention drugs). *Théo and Hugo's* treatment of its HIV-positive character, the charming and playful Hugo, and of the procedures for addressing potential infection is unremarkable: it makes it seem extraordinary that so few films in the West have addressed HIV/Aids in this way, as a part of sexual and romantic

life. Despite the relevance and elegance of the conceit, the directors had to forgo government funding in order to make the film to their vision.

Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau have been depicting HIV-positive characters since their first feature *Jeanne and the Perfect Guy* in 1998, and their new film joins Gillian Robespierre's recent abortion romcom *Obvious Child* in treating the interconnection of hook-ups and hospitals in a way that's realistic without being blasé. In fact, the intimate narrative of infection and its



Metro sexual: Théo, Hugo and a fellow passenger

timetable of drugs, blood tests and check-ups becomes a bond between two men who didn't know each other's names when their eyes, lips and bodies met at 4.30 that morning. Although gay cruising clubs have reasserted themselves as an out-and-proud element of urban gay culture, they – like HIV/Aids issues – have rarely been depicted in cinema without Hayes Code-like coyness and a curtain falling. When *Théo and Hugo* screened at the Berlinale earlier this year, it drew attention for the almost wordless first 20 minutes, which are focused on sex play among multiple men in the basement of a Parisian cruising club called The Impact.

What could be dismissed as pornographic is marked by care and tenderness, from the sweet realism of all the clubbers being naked bar their socks and shoes to the sudden, non-realist, bright-white light that separates the couple from the red- (hot) and blue-lit basement – colours that blur together the Tricolour and the 'Red Hot + Blue' Aids-awareness compilation album series. Added to this is the precision of the sound edit, which pumps up the volume as Hugo and Théo leave their previous partners to embrace each other, and drops away when Hugo performs oral sex on Théo, so that panting breaths come to the fore to place us in Théo's point of hearing.

Once they are having penetrative sex, the focus shifts to Théo and Hugo's faces, close together – and specifically to the look. "I want you to look at me," Théo tells Hugo, who has his eyes closed. This insistence on the intimacy of the shared gaze circulates through the film: when they leave the club and rent bikes, Hugo declares, as Théo cycles ahead, "I can't lose sight of you." Later, on the way to the hospital to seek preventive treatment for Théo after Hugo has disclosed his HIV-positive status, Théo flashes back on their coital dialogue. But when Hugo joins him at the hospital, he reminds him that their dialogue was more nuanced, holding his face and saying, "The eye doesn't lie. Look me in the eye... straight in the eye." On the metro back to Théo's apartment, they gaze into each other's eyes in a close-up.

This loving look amid tired workers is part of the film's central device of queering the city. It first happens when Théo and Hugo leave The Impact, stepping from the red-lit basement to the blue-lit bar full of solo men (a vision from Fassbinder's *Querelle*), and from the red light outside the bar door to the harsh streetlight a few steps down the pavement. Whereas



Red hot lovers: Couët (left) and Nambot

previous generations of queer cinema focused on underground sex and clubbing culture, Ducastel and Martineau suggest that their contemporary lovers can have both the club and the city.

The film also revels in the heady fantasy of being out (in both senses) in Paris at night, rendering the classic cinematic city unfamiliar by queering it with Hugo's loud, passionate declarations of love for Théo's penis. "The night belongs to the women and fags," says Théo as they pass a female cleaner on their way out of Hôpital Saint-Louis, where he has been treated with calm consideration by a female triage nurse and female doctor.

When the A&E doctor reassures Théo that he has received treatment within the "timeframe",

The film tells its tale of one night out in Paris through a combination of formal precision, urgent information and a twist on the classic love story

the film's entwined narratives of falling in love and worrying about illness unite. In that entwining, *Théo and Hugo* pays tribute to Agnès Varda's *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962), while its French title *Théo et Hugo dans le même bateau* tips its hat to Jacques Rivette's *Céline and Julie Go Boating* (1974) – two films that are celebrated for their feminist revisioning of the city. Mediating between the erotic night of the cruising club and the mundane night of the A&E workers, *Théo and Hugo* offers an inventively pedestrian romance as self-deprecating, lively and everyday as stopping for a post-club kebab and taking the metro; but, as the kebab shopworker and a fellow metro passenger spill their secrets to the couple, the film also shows how falling in love at first sight charges each moment.

Where Ducastel and Martineau's earlier film *Born in '68* (2008) explored generational and political time over decades, here they pack histories familial (Théo's homophobic father harassing him), literary (Hugo becoming a notary's clerk after reading Balzac) and relational into 93 real-time minutes of intense feeling. Like *Cléo*, *Théo and Hugo* is a film about time: Karelle + Kuntur's soundtrack is built from beats that sometimes sound like an old-fashioned clock tolling, sometimes like a watch ticking. Whenever characters check their cellphones, pale-blue numerals are superimposed on screen. As Théo agrees to go to Hugo's apartment with him, they check the time on his phone and see the minutes flip from 05.59 to 06.00, the colour of the numerals the same as the dawn sky that Théo has just seen from his attic window.

A love born anonymously and erotically in a basement can survive what Hegel called the "night of the self" – the journey through fear and loss of identity – and walk out into the day. Compelling not least because both its characters and their relationship survive to the end of the film, *Théo and Hugo* disproves the graffiti its protagonists cycle past shortly before Hugo reveals his status: 'VIVRE DE DRAME/MOURIR D'AMOUR'. Not any more. Queer cinema steps away from melodrama in *Théo and Hugo*, even as its beats carry the lovers into a new day. ☺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Emmanuel Chaumet

Screenplay/
Dialogue
Olivier Ducastel
Jacques Martineau

Cinematography
Manuel Marmier

Editor
Pierre Deschamps

Art Directors
Barnabé d'Hauteville
Clara Noël

Music
Karelle
Kuntur

Sound

Tristan Pontécaille
Clément Badin
Victor Praud

©Ecce Films,
Épicentre Films
Production
Companies
Emmanuel Chaumet

presents an Ecce
Films production in
co-production with
Épicentre Films

Cast
Geoffrey Couët
Théo

François Nambot
Hugo

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor
Peccadillo

Pictures Ltd

French theatrical title
*Théo et Hugo dans
le même bateau*

Present-day Paris, the early hours of Saturday morning. In the basement of a gay cruising club, a young man with curly hair watches two other men having sex, manoeuvring close to them so that he can begin to kiss, and then have sex with, one of them. The two leave the club together and rent bikes, freewheeling north until curly-haired Théo naively celebrates not donning a condom during their sexual encounter, unbeknown to Hugo, who now reveals he is HIV-positive. They make a call to an Aids hotline and Théo heads alone to Hôpital Saint-Louis for emergency preventive treatment. Hugo texts, calls and follows, to tell Théo the story of how

he came to be infected and to offer him support. Théo receives triple-therapy pills and an appointment for a blood test, and the two men, bonded by this experience, leave the hospital together. It is still the early hours of the morning. A hunt for food leads them to a kebab shop staffed by a Syrian architect, thence to a park overlooking the canal, where they fight and make up. They catch the first metro of the morning, where they talk to a woman who works as a hotel chambermaid. At Théo's apartment, they kiss and caress before Hugo leaves – only to return and invite Théo to stay at his place, at least until the blood test on Monday. It is 6am.

Aloys

Switzerland/France/Italy/The Netherlands/Germany 2016
 Director: Tobias Nölle
 Certificate 12A 90m 41s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

"Do you know anyone at all?" That's the taunting query addressed to dour, antisocial PI Aloys Adorn (Georg Friedrich) by his mysterious phone interlocutor (Tilde von Overbeck), who may or may not be called Vera. It's a fair question, to which the answer seems to be no. We've already seen him standing solitary and impassive at his father's cremation, having brusquely rejected a friendly reminder from the undertaker's receptionist (Agnes Lampkin) that they were once at school together. The nearest we witness to a human emotion from him is when he directs a small, pained half-smile to a sheep in the park. Even his relationship with his tabby cat (the only other resident of his high-rise apartment) appears distant. His evenings are spent watching the DV cassettes he obsessively shoots, professionally and personally (at one point he boasts of having "over 5,000 hours of film" on his shelves), or pedalling grimly on his exercise bike. Knowing anybody, let alone liking them, is evidently beyond his agenda.

This begins to change when, having fallen drunkenly asleep on a late-night bus and had the tools of his trade (his camcorder and cassettes) stolen, he starts receiving phone calls from a woman who claims to have them. She proposes a Japanese therapeutic technique called 'phone-walking', whereby they meet up on imaginary expeditions. In Aloys's fantasy, the seductive voice on the phone becomes identified with his eccentric, suicidal neighbour Vera, who lives in the adjacent apartment. She also appears to be watching him, filming him with his own camera, sending shots of him to his phone; this badly undermines him both emotionally and professionally, violating the third of the 'Ten Steps to Invisibility' he keeps on his wall: "You see everything, nobody sees you."

In his debut feature, which won the Fipresci prize at Berlin, Swiss writer/director Tobias Nölle teases us rather as Vera teases Aloys, enticing us to decide how much of what we see is reality and how much the fantasies germinating in his lonely, paranoid mind. Does he really meet two men in the lift with a sheep they retrieved from his animal-crazed neighbour's apartment? (Aloys deserves an award for the most creative use of sheep since Grímur Hákonarson's *Rams*.) Does he really adopt her iguana after she's carted off on a stretcher? Or wind up in the final scene sleeping on the floor of her hospital room, seemingly undetected by the staff? And in any case, does it matter, given that perception is what's in play here? As Vera tells Aloys, "Everything that moves is in our heads, inside ourselves, and that is what counts."

Vera – whose name, it's worth noting, ironically means 'true' in Italian – shape-changes, morphing into Aloys's dead father, or twinning her baleful long-nosed stare with that of a spoonbill. (Fauna, exotic and otherwise, including a memory-challenged seal, form a running sub-theme.) She mocks his father-fixation by addressing a parcel to 'Adorn & Clone' (in German, a pun on 'Adorn & Son'), now perplexing him with enigmatic mind games, now expressing concern over the health of his cat. But her gadfly tactics serve to liberate him, opening him up to the point where he can fantasise playing lively



Two of a kind: Georg Friedrich, Tilde von Overbeck

piano duets with her in front of an enthusiastic audience of his neighbours and acquaintances. This is the film's most conventional element, the uptight-guy-loosened-up-by-madcap-woman plot device stretching back through *What's up, Doc?* (1972) to *Bringing up Baby* (1938) and beyond, but Nölle handles it with enough ingenuity and style to keep it from seeming stale.

Veteran actor Friedrich (*The Piano Teacher*) brings a watchful, haunted edge to Aloys, his suspicious sidelong glances (often mimicked by Nölle's prowling camera) always anticipating an ambush or, yet worse, a friendly greeting. He's well matched by von Overbeck as the unpredictable Vera, remarkably enough making her screen debut; there's no hint of inexperience in her mercurial mood-shifts and nuanced delivery. The brooding

synth-and-guitar-dominated score from Swiss duo Jegenhuber (Tom Huber and Beat Jegen) lends a shifting, melancholic overlay, occasionally diverting into manic piano riffs.

In tracking the film's DNA, reviewers have invoked Michel Gondry and Charlie Kaufman's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), with its fantasy mix of the existential and the surreal and its fix on the power of imagination. There are echoes too of Coppola's *The Conversation* (1974), with Aloys (like Gene Hackman's Harry Caul) finding himself turned from observer to observed, and maybe even a hint of Roy Andersson in the deadpan spoofing of supposed national characteristics. But Nölle, whatever influences he may have absorbed, is evidently a filmmaker with a vision of his own, and one with an exceptionally accomplished first feature to his credit. **C**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Christof Neracher
 Christian Davi
 Thomas Thümen

Written by

Tobias Nölle

Director of Photography

Simon Guy Fässler

Editor

Tobias Nölle

Production Designer

Su Erdt

Music

Tom Huber

Beat Jegen

Sound Design

Peter Bräker

Costume Designer

Leonie Zykan

Production Companies

A Hugofilm

Productions, Petit

Films, SRF, SRG

SSR, ARTE G.E.I.E.

Production

Companies

A Hugofilm

production

in co-production

with Schweizer Radio

und Fernsehen, SRG

SSR, ARTE G.E.I.E.

and Petit Film

With financial support

from Bundesamt für

Kultur (EDI), Schweiz

Zürcher Filmstiftung,

Suissimage, Media

Programme of the

European Union

and Aide aux cinémas

du monde - Centre

National du Cinéma

et de l'Image Animée

- Ministère des

Affaires Étrangères

et du Développement

International -

Institut français

Success Passage

Antenne, Succes

Cinema, Stage

Pool Focal/Ernst

Göhner Stiftung,

Gemeinde Erlenbach

A film by Tobias Nölle

Project development

with support from

Torini Film Lab,

Cinemart Rotterdam,

Berlinale Co-

production market,

Ekran, Les Arcs

- Work in Progress

Cast

Georg Friedrich

Aloys Adorn

Tilde von Overbeck

Vera

Agnes Lampkin

Julie Kramer

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Eureka Entertainment

Present-day Zurich. Following the death of his father, fortysomething Aloys Adorn is left as sole operative of their private investigation agency, Adorn and Son. He continues with his current assignment, secretly filming and recording an adulterous man on behalf of the man's wife. On his way home by bus Aloys drinks and falls asleep; he wakes in an empty bus to find that his camcorder and all his tapes have been stolen. At home, he receives a phone call from a woman who claims she robbed him; she proposes that they play 'phone-walking', whereby they simultaneously imagine visiting the same series of venues. Working from things she's said, Aloys visits a nightclub, where he mistakes a drag queen for his caller. Aloys receives a parcel containing the missing tapes, but by now he is obsessed with the woman on the phone. His neighbour Vera attempts suicide and is carried off on a stretcher. Aloys adopts an iguana Vera had in her apartment, then starts imagining himself in various places with her, whom he identifies with the mystery woman – in a wood, in a restaurant, at the zoo, in his apartment playing piano duets before a delighted gathering. The real Vera comes and knocks on his door, but he refuses to let her in. The imagined Vera throws herself off his balcony. With the real Vera once more in hospital, Aloys goes to her room, where he sleeps on the floor beside her bed. Or so he imagines...

Ambulance

Norway/The Netherlands/Finland/Denmark 2016
Director: Mohamed Jabaly

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

"The reason doesn't matter," says filmmaker Mohamed Jabaly of the commencement of the 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict. "We woke up and found ourselves closer to death than ever."

The reason does matter, of course, to many of the 'we' he references – Palestinian residents of Gaza City – and within the ongoing context of an intractably disputed region. But Jabaly's decontextualised fatalism sets the mood for a film that emphasises present-tense chaos rather than its past origins or future solutions. As he documents the aftermaths of numerous bombings, Jabaly steers clear of direct engagement with the politics of the situation. Just one man, standing in the wreckage of the business he ran for 30 years, makes a direct appeal: "How was this factory fighting Israel?" Otherwise, the name of Israel barely comes up, except as an issuer of scattergun and variably reliable warnings of bombings. Hamas is not mentioned at all.

Jabaly and his camera spontaneously attach themselves to an ambulance crew when bombardment begins in July 2014. The ambulance not only transports survivors to hospital but also evacuates people from areas being bombed; in time it comes to serve as a mobile replacement for the community hubs and havens that are being reduced to rubble. An initial sense that the taciturn, hard-working crew aren't exactly keen on bringing a green young filmmaker along for the ride gradually reveals itself as part of a modest but effective narrative arc. "The silence he exuded baffled me," Jabaly observes of the crew's leader, Abu Marzouk, while the older man appears to be simply ignoring his chatter. When, much later in the film, Jabaly absents himself and Marzouk invites and welcomes him back, there's a satisfying sense of respect having been earned amid the senseless grimness. This small reward to the audience is characteristic of a subtly effective organisation of material by Jabaly and editor Nanna Frank Møller. Elsewhere, any impression that the Gazan citizens are naively or recklessly remaining in harm's way is countered by miserable scenes of hundreds of people attempting to



Rubble jeopardy: Ambulance

leave the country and being prevented from doing so by a closed Egyptian border.

It's the obviously unplanned and reactive nature of Jabaly's filming that makes it effective. Footage of dead and broken bodies will cross some viewers' thresholds in terms of appropriate levels of respect, and Jabaly can seem overly excitable in his zeal to, as he puts it, "be close to the action". But the spontaneity of his approach is impactful when he captures the sheer confusion of people who don't know whether or not they can safely return to their homes during a supposed ceasefire, or whether telephoned and texted warnings are genuine or fake.

Interesting, too, is the degree to which Jabaly's own persona as transmitted via his voiceover rejects the archetype of the fearless and stoically self-sacrificing war correspondent. Here is the witness-bearer as profoundly scared, unashamedly self-interested and just a tiny bit horribly thrilled by the proximity of death. After experiencing a bombing at perilously close range, and recording its chaotic aftermath on a camera he claims not to have been aware was still running, Jabaly states that he "watched the video over and over again". His urge to document and his access to technology have provided him with the means to revisit obsessively the moment of his own near-death – a potent metaphor for a conflict that increasingly perpetuates itself via the obsessive spreading and sharing of arguments, testimonies, artistic interpretations, memes and infographics as well as through warfare. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Producer John Arvid Berger	Filmcenter, Norwegian	theatrical title Ambulance
Writer Mohamed Jabaly	Filminstitute (NFI), Kulturæringstiftelse	
Cinematographer Mohamed Jabaly	Isene Sparebank 1 Nord-Norge	
Editor Nanna Frank Møller	Filmcamp, Jabfilm, Fond for lyd og bilde, Fritt Ord, IDFA	
Composer Gaute Barilindhaug	Bertha Fund, Toft Film, Ice-9, Tvibit	
Sound Designer Rune Hansen	Executive Producers Christine Cynn, Hermann Greuel, Kristian Mosvold, Gitte Hansen, Esther van Messel	
Production Companies A film by Mohamed Jabaly	In Colour [1.78:1]	
Produced by Jabfilm	Subtitles	
Produced in co-operation with Tvibit & NUFF	Distributor DocHouse	
Production support broadcasters: NRK, YLE, DR	Norwegian	
Financiers: North Norwegian		

A documentary filmed in Gaza City in 2014. Twenty-three-year-old resident Mohamed Jabaly is filming an operation in a local hospital when bombardment of the city by Israeli forces begins. Jabaly gains permission to accompany the ambulance crew, led by driver Abu Marzouk, as they go to the aid of the injured. Marzouk and his crew are ambivalent about Jabaly's presence, and his family wants him to keep clear of danger, but he remains with the crew as the conflict continues over the ensuing seven weeks. As 18,000 homes are destroyed and 500,000 people displaced, Jabaly films the bombings and the dead and injured being pulled from wreckage. He interviews survivors who bemoan the destruction of their houses and belongings and the fact that reliable warnings are not given. He also visits the Palestinian-Egyptian border, where hundreds of would-be refugees are attempting to leave the country. Fighting intensifies, and Jabaly is shaken to find himself in the midst of a bombing. The ambulance crew gradually embrace his presence and help him celebrate his birthday. After two abortive ceasefires, the 51-day conflict ends.

Bad Moms

USA/People's Republic of China 2016
Directors: Jon Lucas, Scott Moore
Certificate 15 100m 34s

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

"I had my first kid when I was 20 years old," explains exasperated Amy Mitchell (Mila Kunis) in her opening voiceover, "and I've been running late ever since." A mother of two on the perpetual run, Amy snaps when she discovers her childish husband pants-down with a webcam girl. She kicks him out of the house, resigns from the PTA, tells the kids to make their own breakfasts and befriends two other dissatisfied mothers: single lush Carla (Kathryn Hahn) and harassed stay-at-home mother of four Kiki (Kristen Bell). The thin plot is strung around Amy challenging pushy, stereotypically 'perfect' and power-craving PTA president Gwendolyn (Christina Applegate) for her position.

Scripted and directed by *Hangover* writers Jon Lucas and Scott Moore (in a slight improvement on their directorial debut, 2013's heinous *21 & Over*), *Bad Moms* pauses for regular chats about maternal frustrations and societal pressures but displays little original insight or genuine feeling on these topics. Any real dissatisfaction or critical threat is mitigated by regular comments such as, "Oh my god, you guys, kids are the best!" and at least half the jokes revolve around penises or some "punch her in the tits" variant. The primary character arc is Amy post-separation: after resolving to sleep with someone at a club, she falls safely into the arms of a handsome widower before she can lapse into promiscuity. By film's end, she's also doubled her salary: women *can* have it all, if only via unconvincing plot contrivance. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Suzanne Todd Bill Block Written by Jon Lucas Scott Moore Director of Photography Jim Denault Edited by James Thomas Emma E. Hickox Production Designer Marcia Hinds Music Christopher Lennertz Sound Mixer David Wyman Costume Designer Julia Caston	& Scott Moore Executive Producers Mark Kamine Wang Zhongjun Wang Zhonglei Jerry Ye Donald Tang Robert Simonds Adam Fogelson Oren Aviv	Clark Duke Dale Kippler Wendell Pierce Principal Burr Leah McKendrick Sharon Megan Ferguson Tessa Lyle Brocato Kent Wanda Sykes Dr Karl Cade Cooksey Jaxon
Cast Mila Kunis Amy Mitchell Kristen Bell Kiki Kathryn Hahn Carla Dunkler Jay Hernandez Jessie Harkness Jada Pinkett Smith Stacy Christina Applegate Gwendolyn James Annie Mumolo Vicky Latrobe Oona Laurence Jane Mitchell Enjay Anthony Dylan Mitchell David Walton Mike Mitchell		Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1] Distributor Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd

Los Angeles, the present. Fed up with her oppressive childcare and professional responsibilities, Amy kicks her husband out of the house and quits the PTA. After becoming friends with two other frustrated mothers – single parent Carla and stay-at-home mother of four Kiki – Amy successfully challenges the pushy Gwendolyn for PTA president and begins a relationship with a handsome widower.

The Beatles Eight Days a Week The Touring Years

Director: Ron Howard

Reviewed by Sam Davies

Which would take longer to sit through, the 12 studio albums recorded by the Beatles, or the documentaries spinning off from the group's eight-year career? Martin Scorsese's *Living in the Material World* (2011) took just one Beatle for its subject, George Harrison, and ran to over three hours. At an exhaustive ten hours, *The Beatles Anthology* produced in 1995 by McCartney, Harrison and Starr set a dauntingly high bar for any filmmakers looking for new angles. The Beatles docs started early, too: the Maysles brothers caught their first visit to the US on 16mm for *What's Happening!* in 1964. Six years later, *Let It Be*, released just after their split had become official, tried to capture the group fly-on-the-wall style, as they rehearsed for a possible return to live performance.

They had quit playing live in 1966, which is the cut-off point here for director Ron Howard. The framing suggests that *Eight Days a Week*'s angle, the prism through which it will approach such well-known material, will be the Beatles as a touring group. And to an extent, it is. There's a fascinating sequence on the Southern leg of their 1964 tour of America and the significance of their insistence on playing to unsegregated audiences: in many venues, this was a first, and segregation did not return in them. Howard has an excellent eyewitness in Larry Kane – who, as a junior radio reporter, wrote to Brian Epstein asking for an interview and was invited to accompany the group for a whole American tour. He went, but only reluctantly ("It was a big news year.")

Obvious dates – Shea Stadium, Budokan, Candlestick Park – are given special attention. Howard doesn't spell it out but it's notable how many small technological details played into the band's decision to stop touring. The Beatles were the first group popular enough to play stadiums – which meant they were playing venues designed for baseball, not music. At Shea Stadium they played through puny 100-watt amps (built especially!) and the existing PA system, essentially a tinny tannoy designed for in-match announcements. Making their escape at Candlestick Park, they were packed into the back



Four for the road: The Beatles

of a security van; sliding around a bare metal box into the walls and each other, the decision to stop touring until further notice was easily made.

But Howard's film essentially uses the touring conceit as a timeframe, and takes in the whole Beatles phenomenon. A small example: the Beatles acquired Epstein as manager after he caught them at the Cavern Club. Howard gives more prominence to the story of Epstein buying them all the suits that created their trademark early uniform than he does to the experience of the Beatles at the Cavern Club itself. Similarly, their time in Hamburg – a pressure-cooker environment of sex, drugs and all-night sets, is skimmed over in rather sanitised fashion. Brett Morgen's 2012 film *Crossfire Hurricane* told the story of the Rolling Stones in similar fashion to *Eight Days a Week*, from a wealth of archive footage. But the description by one eyewitness of the urine running down the venue aisles from teenage crowds so overwhelmed they'd wet themselves is one that would never have got near Howard's film. Instead, there's a wealth of familiar notes struck here: a typical day in the studio narrated by Paul; talking-head quotes such as Howard Goodall's estimate that only Mozart and Schubert wrote as many memorable melodies as there are in the Beatles' songbook.

Eight Days a Week is still a pleasure to watch, and the press conference footage of the Beatles engaging with the reporters is fantastic – a reminder that along with their musical ability, they were also an outstanding comedy improv quartet, with immaculate timing, group interplay and counterpoint. In the context of the Beatles industry, though, in which their story and legacy are regularly packaged and repackaged, *Eight Days a Week* is an honourable but not exceptional entry. A hit but a very familiar one; a hit from before your mother was born, to paraphrase a McCartney number. The follow-up documentary ('...The Studio Years') is probably already in the works. **S**

Ben-Hur

USA/Italy 2016

Director: Timur Bekmambetov

Certificate 12A 123m 9s

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

It may have been inevitable, the aggregation of Hollywood's ongoing remake-athon zeitgeist and the less predictable popularity of sword-and-sandal period epics, abetted by the latest in CGI – one wonders if *The Robe* is on someone's docket as we speak. But, for starters, this new version of Lew Wallace's melodramatic, Golgotha-climaxing, bloodsport-bromance chestnut clocks in at just over two hours. Kvetch if you must over the film's fashionable compression and let's-get-on-with-it storytelling, but next to William Wyler's 1959 Oscar-crowned brontosaurus, which cruises past three and a half hours in its journey to salvation, the new movie practically zips by in a flurry of desert dust. And it doesn't have Stephen Boyd.

But saying that Timur Bekmambetov's film is not as taxing or as dull as Wyler's epic isn't saying much. It is every inch the straining, self-important, meaningful-gaze tosh this genre demands, complete with the obligatory fake-Brit accents (back in the day, megolith Charlton Heston never had to bother) and point-jotting dialogue scenes that are all structured as mini-arguments. It's pre-processed, industrial moviemaking, with no actor permitted a real character or moment of messy humanity (Jack Huston, looking at various points in the story quite like a young Orson Welles, is cast for his blandness). But so it was with Wyler's movie, which wasn't like any of his other films but instead resembled other 1950s biblical hits.

Today, the homogeneity could to some degree be tagged Christian – produced by born-again power-broker couple Mark Burnett and Roma Downey, Bekmambetov's film, particularly at the miraculous ending, has all the personality of a Sunday-school lecture.

That is, except when the story lets Bekmambetov cut loose. In two major sequences, which in some ways exude molecules of the chaotic action of the director's *Night Watch* (2004) and *Day Watch* (2006), *Ben-Hur* becomes subsumed in thundering mayhem. Of course, the chariot race – arguably the only reason anyone except Burnett and Downey might want to make a *Ben-Hur* – is several levels of crazy catastrophe above the 1959 version, shorter and quicker and hardly 100 per cent real stunt work but a nerve-flailing orchestration all the same. Bekmambetov keeps it so fast you're flinching throughout, and not noticing how the hairier violence-in-motion probably didn't involve real people at all. Even better is the ship battle on the Ionian Sea, seen almost entirely from the dungeony perspective of chained galley slaves, as the giant war boats ram each other, boiling oil rains down from the deck and flaming arrows set the man sitting next to you on fire. It's all almost terrifying enough to make you forget and forgive the film's predictable piety.

Because it's 2016, even Burnett and Downey know to play up the story's political bona fides. The characters blather a good deal about whether to resist the Roman occupation like the Zealots (not the al-Qaeda terrorists of their day so much as the radical Free French) or simply live with it, which is the aristocratic hero's strategy early on. *Ben-Hur*'s sympathy for the Zealots – they just want their land back – is quickly scoffed

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Nigel Sinclair
Scott Pascucci
Brian Grazer
Ron Howard

Written by

Mark Monroe

Director of

Photography

Michael Wood

Edited by

Paul Crowder

Sound

Nathan Evans

©Dummy Copy Line

Production

Companies

The Beatles' Apple
Corps Limited
and Studiocanal
and Polygram
Entertainment
present a White
Horse Pictures
and Imagine
Entertainment
production in
association with
Diamond Docs
A Ron Howard film
Executive

Producers

Jeff Jones
Jonathan Clyde
Michael Rosenberg
Guy East
Nicholas Ferrall

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Studiocanal Limited

A documentary examining the career of the Beatles from their formation in 1960 to the point in 1966 when they retired from live performance. The film largely comprises archive footage from concerts and press conferences, alongside reflections from the Beatles themselves (including new interviews with Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr).

Blair Witch

USA 2016
Director: Adam Wingard
Certificate 15 89m 3s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Going by the number of films that have trod its well-worn path into the woods, Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez's *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) is the most influential horror movie of the past two decades. Yet, as a franchise, the project has been on hold since Joe Berlinger's little-liked *Book of Shadows: Blair Witch 2* (2000). Considering that the *Paranormal Activity* series, which positioned itself as the next generation of found-footage horror, has produced seven entries since 2007, it's almost perverse that things have been so quiet on the Blair Witch front since the turn of the century.

The writer-director team of Simon Barrett and Adam Wingard (*A Horrible Way to Die*, *You're Next*, *The Guest*) managed to make this relaunch of the series in secret (under the generic title *The Woods*) before even admitting that it was a Blair Witch project – somewhere between a sequel, a remake and a reboot. Underlying the enterprise is the obvious intention that footage should now be found in the Burkittsville woods as regularly as outbreaks of paranormal activity are caught on home-video equipment.

Discounting *Book of Shadows* entirely, *Blair Witch* returns to the format of *The Blair Witch Project* – an expedition into the woods chronicled by camera-toting documentarians (who have lightweight earpiece cameras in contrast to the heavy equipment lugged by their predecessors). Disruptions of geography (and here also time) convey the malign influence of the undefined witch so that the commonplace business of getting lost in the woods takes on a dimension of spiritual terror. Previous Wingard-Barrett films are notable for complex, often uncomfortable family stories – and there are underdeveloped traces here of that approach. James (James Allen McCune) is so fixated on the possibility that his sister Heather (from *The Blair Witch Project*) might still be alive that he doesn't notice how much his long-time friend Peter (Brandon Scott) disapproves of the way his recent friend Lisa (Callie Hernandez) is exploiting him as a juicy documentary subject. The plot feint is a hint that Heather might have become a Blair Witch – but the actual outcome, owing a little to (of all



A stalk in the woods: Valorie Curry

people) Chris Marker, has Heather's successor Lisa metaphorically swallowed by a muddy tunnel (in a scene reminiscent of the 2013 British found-footage film *The Borderlands*) and spat out as a perhaps murderous, perhaps monstrous final girl.

Like the tool-up space marines of *Aliens*, foolishly confident they have the firepower to face the beast that killed all those civilians in *Alien*, the new Blair Witch investigators assume that their improved tech (GPS, internet access, a camera drone) will keep them safe, and are swiftly disillusioned. While *The Blair Witch Project* showed almost nothing, this affords glimpses of a long-limbed, tree-dwelling monster – though the basic stratagem of terror is still simple disorientation (a night that doesn't end, time passing differently for separated characters) and panic conveyed with jittery camerawork and moments of despair. Adding more characters to the crew – locals who may or may not be faking the whole thing, a surplus girl whose cut foot gets infected with a body-horror twig-worm condition – makes for a more crowded story and ups the shock factor, but perhaps dissipates the simple scariness of the first film. Plus, *The Blair Witch Project* was an original; no matter how many spins *Blair Witch* puts on the material, it's a sequel – and, furthermore, a sequel designed to relaunch a franchise. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Sean Daniel Joni Levin Duncan Henderson	Regional Fund for Film and Audiovisual	Hortator
Screenplay Keith Clarke John Ridley	Executive Producers Mark Burnett Roma Downey Keith Clarke John Ridley	Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]
Director of Photography Oliver Wood	Jason F. Brown Enzo Sisti	Some screenings presented in 3D
Editor Dody Dorn		Distributor Paramount Pictures UK
Production Designer Naomi Shohan	Cast Jack Huston Judah Ben-Hur Toby Kebbell Messala Severus Rodrigo Santoro Jesus Nazanin Boniadi Esther Ayelet Zurer Naomi Ben-Hur Pilou Asbæk Pontius Pilate Sofia Black D'Elia Tirzah Ben-Hur Morgan Freeman Ilderim Marwan Kenzari Drusus Moises Arias Dismas James Cosmo Quintus David Walmsley Marcus Decimus Haluk Bilginer Simonides Yasen Atour Jacob Francesco Scianna Kadeem Gabriel Farnese Elijah Denise Tantucci Avigail Jarrett Merz Florus Iaon Gunn Gestas Dato Bakhtadze	
Music Marco Beltrami		
Production Sound Mixer Marco Fiumara		
Costume Designer Varya Avdyushko		
Visual Effects Mr. X Inc. Soho VFX Scanline VFX Park Road Post Locktix Sandbox FX Basilic Fly Studio		
Stunt Co- ordinators Steve Dent Walter E. Scott		
©Metro-Goldwyn- Mayer Pictures Inc. and Paramount Pictures Corporation		
Production Companies Paramount Pictures and Metro-Goldwyn- Mayer Pictures present a Sean Daniel production in association with LightWorkers Media A Timur Bekmambetov film Produced with the support of the Lazio		

Jerusalem, during the Roman occupation. Messala, adopted brother of nobleman Judah Ben-Hur, leaves home in a fit of pique to join the Roman army.

Some years later, Judah is married. Messala returns as a centurion to quell a rebellion. When a guard is killed by an arrow shot from the Hur rooftop, Judah confesses to the crime to save his family from Messala's edict. After five years as a galley slave, he escapes when his ship is destroyed in battle. He is washed ashore in Africa, where a nomadic horse trainer takes him in. Together they conspire to go to Jerusalem and challenge Messala – a champion charioteer – on the track. Beforehand, Judah finds his wife, who has become a follower of Jesus, and his mother and sister, now lepers. Judah is victorious in the chariot race. He finds his wife on Golgotha. His family are healed by the rain following Christ's death. Judah and Messala are reconciled.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Roy Lee Steven Schneider Keith Calder Jess Calder Written by Simon Barrett Director of Photography Robby Baumgartner Editor Louis Cioffi Production Designer Thomas S. Hammock Music Adam Wingard Production Sound Mixer Matt Willoughby-Price Costume Designer Katia Stano	Production Companies Lionsgate presents a Lionsgate, Vertigo Entertainment, Room 101, Snoot Entertainment production Executive Producers Jenny Hinkley Daniel Myrick Eduardo Sanchez Gregg Hale Film Extracts <i>The Blair Witch Project</i> (1999)	Peter Valorie Curry Talia Corbin Reid Ashley Wes Robinson Lane Dolby Digital Colour by Technicolor [1.33:1] Distributor Lionsgate UK
©Lions Gate Films Inc.	Cast James Allen McCune James Callie Hernandez Lisa Brandon Scott	

US, present day. Fifteen years after filmmaker Heather disappeared while investigating the Blair Witch legend near Burkittsville, Maryland, her brother James is given hope by an online video that might show her alive in a derelict house in the woods. With documentarian Lisa and friends Peter and Ashley, James heads to Burkittsville. Lane and Talia, the local Blair Witch enthusiasts who found the footage, say that they will show the group where it was discovered if they can come along. In the woods, the factions argue when it seems that Lane is faking Blair Witch stick figures, but supernatural forces harass the investigators. Time and space seem to warp, as night extends indefinitely. Members of the party go missing or are killed by a figure who might be the witch. Lisa and James make it to the house, but Lane tips Lisa into the cellar. She squeezes free through a tunnel and kills Lane, then realises that the figure in the clip misidentified as Heather is herself during this ordeal. James apologises to Lisa for involving her in his doomed mission.

The Blue Room

France 2014
Director: Mathieu Amalric
Certificate 15 75m 22s

Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

Ever since Jean Renoir and Julien Duvivier's adaptations in the early 1930s, Georges Simenon's novels have provided French cinema with a constant supply of atmospheric crime stories – both the Inspector Maigret books and what the author called his 'hard novels', in which crime is embedded into the everyday, from Parisian streets to deep provincial France (and beyond). As in *The Blue Room*, these stories frequently chart how overwhelming sexual passion wrecks the lives of weak men, with tragic consequences that they seem fatalistically unwilling to curb.

One can see what attracted Mathieu Amalric, as director and star, to this *crime passionnel* in a regional backwater. A story of doomed lovers, in the film as in the book, it is very much told from the point of view of the man, Julien Gahyde (Amalric). *The Blue Room* starts with a torrid sex scene between Julien and Esther (Stéphanie Cléau), set in a blue hotel room, as per the title. Amalric as director then filters the story through flashbacks edited in mosaic-like fashion, anchored in Julien's questioning by the investigating magistrate (Laurent Poitrenaux) following the death by poisoning of his wife Delphine (Léa Drucker). The narrative structure enables him to contrast the violence of illicit sexual desire (Esther bites Julien on the mouth, drawing blood) with Julien's sexless though affectionate married life with Delphine and their young daughter Suzanne (Mona Jaffart).

Julien dominates the film: he is endowed with a successful professional life (selling farm machinery), while Delphine and Esther, in the familiar roles of wife and mistress, are barely sketched in. The peculiarity of this drama is to give us access to the main protagonist's point of view and yet withdraw much vital information. Delphine's death, like that of Esther's (barely glimpsed) husband Nicolas, will remain a mystery. Did Esther or Julien inject the poison into the jam that killed Delphine? Did Esther nudge her already ailing husband towards his death? We will never know and, in true Simenon fashion, it does not matter. All is stifling provincial atmosphere, desperate lives and lethal passions. When they are both tried and sentenced to life imprisonment, in the tribunal whose blue walls echo those of the hotel room, Esther says almost triumphantly: "You see Julien, they did not separate us."

Excellent as all the actors are, Amalric's main weapon in telling this tale is his own performance and in particular his (as ever) fascinatingly enigmatic face. One of today's major figures in French auteur cinema, he has graced a wide range of films, from Arnaud Desplechin's *Kings & Queen* (2004) and *A Christmas Tale* (2008) to Roman Polanski's *Venus in Fur* (2013), exuding a seductive yet faintly menacing persona – something that also enables him to play 'foreign' villains such as Dominic Greene in the Bond film *Quantum of Solace* (2008).

At the same time, the sardonic wit and refinement that Amalric projects, underlined by his suave voice, are somewhat at odds with Simenon's hero, who is presented in the novel as a rougher, working-class figure. Indeed, the



Kill your darlings: Léa Drucker, Mathieu Amalric

sociological depth of Simenon's *The Blue Room* – the class difference between Julien and the bourgeois Esther, for example – is rather lost in the film, which has been updated to the present day; the modest grocery store where Esther works has been turned into a more glamorous pharmacy; and Julien and Delphine's house is a surprisingly modernist cube. Nevertheless, Amalric evocatively translates Simenon's penchant for rendering the evanescence but also the existential weight of lived experience. As Julien tells the magistrate, "Life is different when you live it and when you go back over it after."

Paradoxically, *The Blue Room* is both a producer's commission – it was suggested by Paolo Branco – and a personal project for Amalric, who has long been fascinated by this particular Simenon novel (and has cast his real-life partner Stéphanie Cléau in the role of Esther). At 75-minutes, *The Blue Room* might feel like a B-movie or a television adaptation – especially since it was shot in two weeks

on a low budget – were it not for Amalric's impeccable art-cinema credentials (he has directed several short and feature films, including the successful *On Tour* in 2010), and his film's uncluttered *mise en scène* and precise framing in the old-fashioned 4:3 image ratio. *The Blue Room* wears its cinephilia lightly but distinctly. The provincial crime theme inevitably suggests Chabrol, while the Bernard Herrmann-like soaring melodramatic music evokes Hitchcock.

Simenon's novel, first published in 1963, has now been reissued in France with the film's poster on the cover (designed by Blutch, who plays the small part of a psychologist in the film). With *The Blue Room*, on which Simenon's son John acted as associate producer, Amalric takes his deserved place in a long line of prestigious filmmakers (Renoir, Duvivier, Bertrand Tavernier, Henri-Georges Clouzot, Claude Autant-Lara and Claude Chabrol, to name a few) who have successfully translated the author's powerful distillation of human passions to the screen. 

Credits and Synopsis

Screenplay
Stéphanie Cléau
Mathieu Amalric
Based on the novel
by Georges Simenon
Director of Photography
Christophe Beaucarne
Editor
François Gédigier
Art Director
Christophe Offret
Music
Grégoire Hetzel
Sound
Olivier Mauvezin
Costume Designer
Dorothee Guiraud

©Alfama Films
- Arte France
Cinéma - Film(s)
Production Companies
Paulo Branco
presents
An Alfama Films
Production, Film(s),
Arte France Cinéma
with the participation

of Centre National
du Cinéma et de
l'Image Animée
and of Canal+,
Ciné+, Arte France
in association with
Cofinova 10
with the support of La
Région des Pays de la
Loire in partnership
with the CNC
with the help of the
Bureau d'accueil
des tournages des
Pays de la Loire
Realised with the
collaboration of
Georges Simenon
Limited

Cast
Mathieu Amalric
Julien Gahyde
Léa Drucker
Delphine Gahyde
Stéphanie Cléau
Esther Despierre
Laurent Poitrenaux
investigating judge
Serge Bozon

policeman
Blutch
psychologist
Mona Jaffart
Suzanne Gahyde
Olivier Mauvezin
Nicolas Despierre

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.33:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
MUBI

French theatrical title
La Chambre bleue

Provincial France, present day. Julien Gahyde and Esther Despierre, both married, conduct a secret affair, meeting on Thursdays in the blue room of a local hotel. The death of Esther's sickly husband Nicolas prompts suspicion in their small town. When Julien's wife Delphine dies from poisoning shortly afterwards, the lovers are arrested.

Julien's story is told in flashback through his interrogations by the investigating magistrate: we learn of his quiet family life with Delphine and their young daughter Suzanne, his successful career as the manager of an agricultural machinery firm, and the family's seaside holiday. This is contrasted with his former school friend Esther, who deliberately seeks him out when he returns to the area, and their subsequent torrid sexual encounters. After the death of her husband, Esther makes increasing demands on Julien, who tries to distance himself from her. He ignores the increasingly menacing messages she sends him, and later refuses to acknowledge to the judge that he received them. Although there is a strong suggestion that Esther put the poison in the jam that killed Delphine (and also possibly hastened Nicolas's death), the facts are never fully elucidated and Julien's motives remain opaque.

The court sentences both to life imprisonment.

The Brother

Canada 2014

Director: Ryan Bonder

Certificate 15 86m 0s

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

The dual stereotypes of career criminals as sleek, modernist technophiles or uncouth thugs are pervasive and enduring. But as this interestingly offbeat UK thriller reminds us, there's no particular reason that one who hurts and steals shouldn't be a shambling hipster in a duffel coat, or a gallery assistant with faultless taste in retro home furnishings and a sideline in northern soul dancing.

Eli (Jed Rees) is the former, Adam (Tygh Runyan) the latter: though both have followed the professional example set by their shady gunrunning father Jack (Anthony Head), the fact that they have other, more refined priorities in life is indicated in the scene where they come to blows over how exactly Adam should organise his extensive collection of vinyl records. Quentin Tarantino is the obvious reference point for such knowing, quirky humanising of violent characters, and his influence does show here. But with its thoughtful use of colour and focus, its preoccupation with music and rhythm and its thematic interest in family ties, temptation, sin and redemption, this film more strongly telegraphs the influence of Jacques Audiard. Like Tom in Audiard's *The Beat That My Heart Skipped* (2005), Adam wants out of the family business but gains an undeniable energy from the money and the bloodlust it engenders. Brother Eli, meanwhile, shares with Tom a habit of escaping the noise of his criminal milieu by playing the piano... Self-protection from life's crueler realities, via deliberate strategies or due to perceived limitations, is a recurring theme here. Adam's love interest Claire (Noémie Merlant), who is deaf (another Audiard echo, this time of 2001's *Read My Lips*), tells him, "It's kind of nice not hearing everything. It makes life less complicated."

What, if any, diagnosis applies to Eli isn't specified, but he has a combination of childlike straightforwardness and limited empathy, which renders him less guilt-stricken than his brother over their participation in beatings and



Some came gun-running: Tygh Runyan

executions. Their father, meanwhile, overflows with verbose theories about why it's basically OK to trade in black-market weapons – "On the surface, it may appear wrong, but underneath, it restores a balance" – until dementia encroaches to veil his own past even more effectively.

The narrative of a bad man reluctantly accepting 'one last job' stubbornly endures in spite of being the most mocked of film-school clichés. Perhaps the cathartic thrills supplied by an immoral protagonist are less problematic if they're tempered by a declared intention to reform. The sheer degree of pain and suffering that Adam willingly inflicts here does stretch his credibility as a sympathetic figure, and certainly as a partner for the angelic Claire. Still, the effort made by Canadian writer/director Ryan Bonder to find new angles on expected genre tropes – and his intelligent entwining of violence, sex and music – lends this an idiosyncratic edge. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Ryan Bonder
Martin Paul-Hus
Written by
Ryan Bonder
Director of Photography
Brian Johnson
Edited by
Karen Porter
Joshua Fairbairn

Production Designer
Byron Broadbent
Music
Marc Bjorknas
Sound Mixer
Nigel Albermaniche
Costume Designer
Ian Macaulay

©Brother
Productions Inc.

Production Companies
With the financial participation of
Telefilm Canada
A Kemistry Films production
A film by Ryan Bonder
Produced with the financial participation of
Telefilm Canada

In association with
Super Channel
Executive Producers
Amy Ricker
Morris Ruskin

Cast
Tygh Runyan
Adam Diamond
Anthony Head

Jack
Jed Rees
Eli
Noémie Merlant
Claire
Belinda Stewart-Wilson
Tabitha
Michael Culkin
Henry

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Distributor
Miracle
Communications Ltd

London, the present. Adam is working in a gallery cloakroom, trying to put his criminal past behind him. He is pursued by a man, Richard, who questions him about his father Jack and uncle Reuben, both gunrunners. Adam's ex-lover Tabitha, now involved with Reuben, arrives with a letter from Jack; Adam burns it. Adam's brother Eli convinces him to participate in a job for Reuben in order to settle a debt of Jack's. Adam becomes involved with a woman, Claire; he confesses to her that while working for Jack in the Middle East he shot and killed a child. Jack arrives in London, in poor health. He gives Adam a laptop, whose contents incriminate Reuben; Adam copies the contents on to a drive. Reuben and Jack ostensibly reconcile, and Reuben makes Jack an offer of work.

Reuben's associates try to retrieve the laptop and drive from Adam, who makes a deal with Richard to pass the drive to him. Jack becomes increasingly confused, and Eli and Adam try to get him out of town, but he returns; after a confrontation at his flat, Reuben kills him. Adam finds the body and then, back at his own flat, that of Eli. Tabitha and Reuben are also there, looking for the drive. Tabitha shoots Adam.

Sometime later, Adam is recovering in the countryside with a heavily pregnant Claire. Henry, one of Jack and Reuben's high-up handlers, arrives and delivers a last taped message from Jack. Meanwhile, in London, Richard retrieves the laptop from the gallery cloakroom. He joins Tabitha and Reuben in a car. He opens the bag, and the car explodes.

Captain Fantastic

USA 2016

Director: Matt Ross

Certificate 15 118m 55s

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

The opening helicopter shots of Matt Ross's new film, across the tree-lined mountains of the Pacific Northwest, immediately evoke Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980), and it turns out to be something of an appropriate analogue – one portrait of catastrophic fathering alluding to another. Except that Ross's intentions are clearly in another camp altogether. *Captain Fantastic* straightaway plops us down in those woods, as a tribe of mud-coloured children hunt and kill a deer with only their knives and hands. This turns out to be only one among many 'missions' devised by Viggo Mortensen's studly hippie-patriarch Ben Cash, who is raising his six children (aged eight to 18) in the wild, off the grid, home-schooled, away from the soul-destroying influences of the commercial-capitalist mainstream. They have no phone, no TV, no proper house beyond a large multi-bunk teepee. You do not see soap. With the mother away at a hospital, life is a regimented litany of workouts, reading assignments, yoga sessions, knife-fight training, foraging jaunts, rock-climbing trials and educational discussions about physics, politics, Marx and Noam Chomsky.

A satire on faddish, back-to-nature mega-hipsterism and 'unschooling'? Hardly, as it turns out. Though sprinkled with occasional warm character humour, Ross's film is no comedy – as Alex Somers's heart-tugging score alone makes clear. Another interface that arises, while you're figuring out what Ross's point will eventually be, is Peter Weir's *The Mosquito Coast* (1986), but again, whereas we might see obsessive parenting pushed to an ideological menacing extreme, Ross sees something else, something almost aspirational. In fact, in the story's battle of us versus them, the chucklesome moments are found via predictable culture clashes (the Cash kids stupefied by supermarket abundance, aghast at violent videogames), and the film's true derision is aimed more sharply at the suckers of the world who shop, eat grilled cheese, send their kids to regular school and, yes, watch movies.

The absence of the children's mother, a depressed bipolar patient, spurs the plot. Her offscreen suicide early on propels the family on a road trip to her funeral service in Arizona, despite her father (Frank Langella) promising to have dad arrested. The film's most powerful scene is a mid-trip visit to middle-class in-laws Steve Zahn and Kathryn Hahn – a tense confrontation between fearless truth-telling sanctimony **➔**



We are family: Viggo Mortensen

and American orthodoxy. Although Ross tips the scales by having the youngest Cash bury the 'normal' kids in home-schooled brilliance, the look of disbelieving terror in Zahn's eyes gives us, for the first time, something close to a perspective that approaches sanity.

That Mortensen's rebel-nurturer is largely right about the poisonous nature of commercialism and politics doesn't make him any less of a crazy demagogue. It's a point Ross fairly backs up when, as Langella's wealthy granddad tries to seize control of the children, it becomes clear that the dead wife's participation in the family's disconnect was enabled by her manic bouts. Dad has no such excuse; he has no identity beyond being Counter-Culture Super-Dad. He's simply smarter and more able than anyone else, and Ross doesn't mean his never-ending self-justifications as some kind of critique.

As the plot shreds credibility by steering towards a weird DIY funeral that would land anyone in prison, not to mention scar the children for life, we tend to forget how, in real-life America, this kind of whole-hog rejectionist lifestyle tends to come with a lot of guns. As it is, the movie can be charming even as its hero is insufferable, and the cast, particularly the kids, are deft and sympathetic. But the experience is akin to a long weekend spent with those know-it-all home-schooling parents who can't stop talking about how they grow their own kale and breastfeed their tots until they're ten. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Lynette Howell Taylor
Jamie Patricof
Shivani Rawat
Monica Levinson

Written by
Matt Ross
Director of
Photography
Stéphane Fontaine

Editor
Joseph Krings
Production
Designer
Russell Barnes
Music
Alex Somers
Sound Designer
Frank Gaeta
Costume Designer
Courtney Hoffman

©Captain Fantastic
Productions LLC
Production
Companies

Bleecker Street and
ShivHans Pictures
present an Electric
City Entertainment
production
A film by Matt Ross
Executive Producer
Nimitt Mankad
Declan Baldwin

Cast
Viggo Mortensen
Ben Cash
Frank Langella
Jack Bertrang,
Grandpa
Kathryn Hahn
Harper
Steve Zahn
Dave
George Mackay
Bodevan Cash, 'Bo'
Samantha Isler
Kielyr Cash
Annlise Basso

Vespyr Cash
Nicholas Hamilton
Relian Cash
Shree Crooks
Zaja Cash
Charlie Shotwell
Nai Cash
Ann Dowd
Abigail Bertrang,
Nana-Abby
Erin Moriarty
Claire
Missi Pyle
Ellen

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
El Films

The Cash family – father Ben and six children – live an idealised alternative lifestyle in the Pacific Northwest forest, killing game for food, training to live off the land and home-schooling in everything from literature to quantum physics. When the mother, hospitalised for depression far away, commits suicide, Ben decides, against the bitter wishes of his wealthy father-in-law, to drive the family south to attend her funeral. Along the way they con a state trooper, shoplift food and visit some very conventional in-laws. After Ben delivers an offensive eulogy, they are thrown out of the funeral service. The grandfather connives to keep the children with him; following a near-fatal accident, Ben ruefully agrees to this. As he leaves, however, he finds that the children have sneaked on to their bus with him. Together they exhume the mother's body and burn it on a pyre.

The Clan

Argentina/Spain/USA 2014
Director: Pablo Trapero



Franco Masini, Giselle Motta, Antonia Bengoechea, Guillermo Francella, Lili Popovich, Peter Lanzani

Reviewed by Maria Delgado

Pablo Trapero emerged as one of the emblematic filmmakers of the New Argentine Cinema with edgy tales of individuals driven to the brink by the conditions in which they live and work. His refashioning of genre has generated films with visceral clout and a distinctive social slant: *El bonaerense* (2002) was a police thriller that explored the culture of corruption underpinning all levels of the force; in *Rolling Family* (2004), the road movie served as a mode of interrogating issues of national identity following the 2001 crisis; *Born and Bred* (2006) proffered an existentialist drama as bleak as the Patagonian landscape in which it evolved; *Lion's Den* (2008) delivered a gritty feminist prison drama; *Carancho* (2010) was a taut, noir-ish legal thriller exposing the scams that underpin the medical insurance industry; and *White Elephant* (2012), set in the slums of Buenos Aires, fused a tale of urban drug warfare with issues of care, conscience and the ethics of societal responsibility.

The Clan (2015) marks a return to the crime movie for the director – but this is a tale crafted very directly from a news story that horrified mid-80s Argentina, retold with a vigorous, in-her-face virtuosity. Trapero plunges the viewer into the protagonists' world with

an unnerving immediacy that may explain why this is his most commercially successful film to date: it has been sold to more than 50 countries and attracted some 2 million viewers in Argentina in its first four months of release.

It revisits the case of the Puccios, who kidnapped four people for extortion between 1982 and 1985, killing three of them before the police broke into their 'respectable' family home in the Buenos Aires suburb of San Isidro to rescue the fourth victim, businesswoman Nélida Bollini de Prado, abducted a month earlier. The narrative is told very much from the viewpoint of the aggressors, led by steely-eyed patriarch Arquímedes (comic actor Guillermo Francella, here cast resolutely against type). His wife and daughters appear to have ignored what was happening in the family home, while son Alex (Peter Lanzani), a promising rugby player, acted as his father's accomplice – the family's first victim, Ricardo Manoukian, was one of his teammates.

Puccio Snr honed his skills working for the secret service during the 1976-83 dictatorship. The film makes reference to his membership of the Secretariat of State Intelligence (SIDE), effectively the secret police deployed by the juntas to execute their culture of terror. Widespread references to the Triple A death squad further position

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Hugo Sigman
Matías Mosteirín
Agustín Almodóvar
Pedro Almodóvar
Esther García
Pablo Trapero
Written by
Pablo Trapero
Script Collaborator
Esteban Student
Julian Loyola
Director of
Photography
Julian Apezteguia
Editors
Pablo Trapero

Alejandro Carrillo
Penovi
Art Director
Sebastián Orgambide
Original Music
Sebastián Escofet
Sound
Vincent D'Elia
Leandro de Loreda
Costumes
Julio Suárez
©Capital Intelectual
S.A., Matanza
Cine, El Deseo
Production
Companies

K&S Films,
Matanza Cine, El
Deseo presents
in co-production
with Telefónica
Studios, Telefe
in association with
Fox International
Productions
with the support of
INCAA – Instituto
Nacional de Cine y
Artes Audiovisuales,
Gobierno de España,
Ministerio de
Educación, Cultura
y Deporte, ICAA

with the participation
of TVE, Movistar+
Executive Producers
Leticia Cristi
Pola Zito

Cast
Guillermo Francella
Arquímedes Puccio
Peter Lanzani
Alejandro
Puccio, 'Alex'
Lili Popovich
Epifania Puccio
Gastón Cocchiarale
Maguila Puccio

Giselle Motta
Silvia Puccio
Franco Masini
Guillermo Puccio
Antonia Bengoechea
Adriana Puccio
Stefanía Koessl
Mónica
Anibal Barenço
Basualdo
Aldo Onofri
Ordoñez
Juan Santiago
Privitera
Eduardo Aulet
Francisco Donovan
Ricardo Manoukian,

'Ricky'
Maria Nydia
Ursi-Ducó
Nélida Bollini de Prado

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Curzon Artificial Eye
Argentinian
theatrical title
El clan

Argentina, 1984. President Raúl Alfonsín comments on the 'Never Again' report published by the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons. A year later, in Buenos Aires, members of the Puccio family are arrested for the kidnap of businesswoman Nélida Bollini de Prado.

The film flashes back to 1982 to show the kidnap and murder of three earlier victims by

dictatorship collaborator Arquímedes Puccio and his associates, who include Arquímedes's son Alejandro (known as Alex). One of Puccio's other sons, Guillermo, leaves in fear; another, Maguila, returns to join the family business.

Arquímedes and Alex are tried and sentenced after their arrest. The latter tries to commit suicide at his trial.

Courted

France 2015
Director: Christian Vincent
Certificate 12A 97m 40s

Reviewed by Sue Harris

Awarded for its script and lead performances at Venice and the French Césars, *Courted* is a slow-paced, slow-burning story of the relationship between a judge and juror, formerly acquainted and brought back together by a child murder trial. That description alone is sufficient to expose the gross inappropriateness of the film's English-language title. 'Courted' completely strikes the wrong tone, setting up expectations of a jolly courtroom romp, with wild passions bubbling beneath the surface of a procedural drama. Courtship, and the emotional awakening of a buttoned-up, solitary and protocol-obsessed judge, are central to the drama. But the institution of the court, referenced in the ceremonial ermine worn by Judge Michel Racine (and in the original French title *L'Hermine*), is a place of sobriety and pain, in which a middle-aged romance between professionals at the top of their game blossoms very tentatively alongside the horrific case of a baby stamped to death by inadequate, inarticulate parents.

The tenor of the film, then, is restrained rather than rapturous, contemplative rather than coy. Fabrice Luchini as Racine gives a masterclass in the art of stillness, sitting watchful (stoat-like even, in *L'hermine's* other meaning in French) above the sterile courtroom, overseeing the bureaucratic work of lawyers, police and jurors while creating space for witnesses and the accused to be heard. Minor characters come and go without preamble, and testimonies weave together without ever seeming to reach the truth of the matter. There is some much needed levity at Racine's frustrated attempts to have his formal title acknowledged by those who come before him, and the banter between the jurors as they introduce themselves over lunch allows the spectator to catch an insight into the ordinariness of those caught

up by civic duty in the legal process. But the proceedings in the courtroom have an air of documentary rather than drama about them, with jurors failing to show up, lawyers dashing out to take phone calls from other cases, and unbearable facts about an infant's violent death set out with clinical objectivity.

The circumstances of baby Mélissa's death remain opaque throughout, and we are no closer at the end of the film to understanding anything about the accused father, Martial (Victor Pontecorvo), and his deeply damaged wife Jessica (Miss Ming), or where the baby fitted into their trainwreck of a family life. The film's moral seriousness and realism – the recognition that truth and law are two very different things – are profound and affecting.

The promise of the solace of friendship is what is uplifting here. As Ditte, the woman who reappears in Racine's life, Sidse Babbett Knudsen (of TV's *Borgen* fame) proves a compelling screen complement to Luchini, equally skilled at commanding the room with stillness and restraint. While Luchini labours with some pretty clumsy expository dialogue in their first private meeting away from the court, Knudsen simply has to move her features slightly to express all the bittersweetness she feels about re-encountering her former suitor. Her French is flawless (although a Danish childhood is there to explain the slight accent), and she completely dazzles in the lighthearted dinner scene she shares with her teenage daughter: the star has one of those faces and smiles that light up the screen in an old-fashioned movie-star way.

With the trial over, Ditte and Racine are free to develop their relationship, and the film's conclusion seems to promise a happy ending for them. Wearing the lace dress Racine so admired on a dinner date some seven years previously, Ditte listens to him swear in a new cohort of jurors. The film closes on the consolation of her warm smile. **S**



Courted

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Sidonie Dumas
Matthieu Tarot
Written by
Christian Vincent
Director of Photography
Laurent Dailland
Editor
Yves Deschamps
Art Director
Patrick Durand
Original Music Composed by
Claire Denamur
Sound Recordist

Philippe Fabbri
Costumes
Carole Gerard

©Albertine Productions, Gaumont, Cinéfrance 1888, France 2 Cinéma
Production Companies
Gaumont presents an Albertine Productions, Gaumont, Cinéfrance 1888, France 2 Cinéma

co-production
Associate producer:
Enfin Seul(s)
Production
With the participation of Canal+, Ciné+, France Télévisions
In association with
Palatine Etoile 11
Développement, Soficinéma 10
Développement

Cast
Fabrice Luchini

Michel Racine
Sidse Babbett Knudsen
Ditte Lorensen-Coteret
Eva Lallier
Ana Lorensen-Coteret
Corinne Masiero
Marie-Jeanne Metzger, juror
Sophie-Marie Larrouy
Coralie Marciano, juror
Fouzia Guezoum
Nacera Boubziz, juror

Simon Ferrante
Simon Orvieto, juror
Moundy
Yacine Balaoui, juror
Serge Flamenbaum
Serge Debruyne, juror
Emmanuel Rausenberger
Rémi Kubiak, juror
Gabriel Lebreton
Frank Leuwen, juror
Salma Lahmer
the cousin, juror
Victor Pontecorvo
Martial Beclin
Candy Ming

Jessica Marton

Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1] Subtitles

Distributor
StudioCanal Limited

French theatrical title
L'Hermine

Northern France, the present. Michel Racine is the presiding judge in the Saint-Omer criminal court. Newly separated from his wife and suffering from a bout of flu, he oversees the trial of a local man accused of murdering his seven-month-old daughter. Among the jurors is an intensive-care doctor, Ditte Lorensen-Coteret, who treated Racine some years previously and with whom he fell deeply in love. They reconnect during the trial and Racine invites Ditte to meet him

outside the courtroom. They tentatively renew their acquaintance and Ditte begins to reciprocate Racine's feelings. The trial is harrowing, and the circumstances of the baby's death are never fully revealed. Although Racine has a reputation as a hardliner, he identifies sufficient flaws in the prosecution's argument for the accused to be acquitted. The film closes on the jurors being selected for a new trial, with Ditte watching as an observer in the courtroom.

him among those associated with the crimes of the dictatorship and subsequently granted immunity by Raúl Alfonsín's government. *The Clan* is thus a film about the wider structures of complicity through which the dictatorship operated, and the ways in which these continued to function in the democratic era.

Trapero eschews a linear narrative, opting instead to cut across the film's different time periods. He defines his approach as one where "fiction comes first" – underlined here by the dark colour palette, claustrophobic interiors and deployment of a series of theatrical stages for the action: the dining-room table around which the Puccios' 'happy family' is forged; the gruesome bathroom where the first victim is held; the dark cellar where the final victim is found; the cars in which Arquímedes and his accomplices observe and then kidnap their victims. In one of the film's most striking sequences, Alex's ecstatic sexual encounter with his girlfriend Mónica is intercut with the grisly torture of second victim Eduardo Aulet. Protracted screams from both scenarios are accompanied by Virus's upbeat song 'Wadu Wadu'.

High-octane sequences are consistently amplified by a score that deploys both 1980s tracks to signal time and place and non-period pieces to heighten ambience, mark out mood and offer a further level of fictionalisation. Ella Fitzgerald and the Ink Spots' 'Into Each Life Some Rain Must Fall' plays as the ransom is dropped off for the first victim, the song ending as the news of Ricardo's death reaches Alex. The Kinks' 1966 hit 'Sunny Afternoon' features on two occasions: we first hear it early on, as Alex enjoys a rugby victory and is congratulated by fans on the pitch; then at the film's end, when he is taken to the court building with his brother Maguila and their accomplices, culminating in his spectacular jump from the fifth floor, his brother's distressed response and a series of captions on the subsequent fate of each Puccio family member.

What is perhaps most extraordinary about the film is that it offers few of *White Elephant's* psychological insights to help us understand the protagonists' actions. In Francella's impressive performance, Arquímedes's creepily composed expression gives nothing away. In one of the most disturbing sequences, the camera follows him through the house as he carries a plate of food to his victim, who is being held in the bathroom and whose screams are chillingly ignored by the rest of the family as they go about their early-evening routine.

The inclusion of archival footage of Alfonsín and General Galtieri is not only part of Trapero's attention to period detail but also serves to contextualise the film within a wider culture of memory politics. Arquímedes is visually identified with Galtieri, as he watches him give his famous television broadcast on 15 June 1982, boasting of Argentine pride in the aftermath of the Malvinas/Falklands defeat. Here, adroit visual storytelling delivers a tale in which the skeletons tumble out of the cupboard. *The Clan* exposes the warped sense of 'the normal' that is legitimised in compromised times, with Arquímedes never doubting the righteous nature of his actions, and the family turning a blind eye to the crimes. **S**

Dare to Be Wild

Ireland 2014
Director: Vivienne DeCourcy
Certificate PG 100m 13s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

An inspiring true-life story lies behind this bland eco-friendly drama, since Irish outsider Mary Reynolds did indeed triumph at the Chelsea Flower Show in 2002, attracting huge acclaim for the way she captured the spirit of Ireland's wild places.

A not insignificant event in its own particular context, then, but on screen the filmmakers struggle to persuade us that this is the epochal moment Mary would like to think it is. Hard to argue against the value of preserving wild places, but the film's evident faith that the Chelsea Flower Show is some epicentre of human achievement seems a tad overdone. Then again, the storytelling and performances are functional at best, so there's little to sweep viewers along on a tide of enthusiasm, horticultural or otherwise. Indeed, when Emma Greenwell's not overly charismatic Mary travels all the way to Ethiopia to seek the help of Tom Hughes's hunky eco-warrior in putting together her 'Celtic Sanctuary' competition design, we can't help feeling that she'd probably be doing the world more good staying with him and helping out with his reforestation plans. Still, that leaves us set for a would-be rousing finale in SW3, in a movie that's well-meaning and decorative but could hardly be described as 'daring' or 'wild'. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Sarah E. Johnson Patricia Lambrecht Rebecca O'Flanagan Robert Walpole	Developed with the assistance of Bord Scannán na hÉireann/the Irish Film Board Made in association with RTE Made with the support of The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland with the participation of Bord Scannán na hÉireann/Irish Film Board	In Colour [2.35:1]
Screenplay Vivienne DeCourcy	Executive Producers Mimi Polk Gittlin Chloe Kassiss-Crowe	Distributor Miracle Communications
Director of Photography Cathal Watters	Cast Emma Greenwell Mary Reynolds Tom Hughes Christy Collard Christine Marzano Charlotte Heavey, 'Shah' Janie Dee Marigold Alex Macquene Nigel Hogg Lorna Quinn Eve Alaa Safi Imad	
Film Editor Nick Emerson Niall Campion Pedro Kos		
Production Designer Ferdia Murphy		
Music Colm Mac Con Iomaire		
Sound Recordist Hugh Fox		
Costume Designer Consolata Boyle		
©Crow's Nest Productions Production Companies Gaia Entertainment and The Irish Film Board/Bord Scannán na hÉireann present a Crow's Nest/Treasure Entertainment Production		

Dublin, turn of the millenium. Mary Reynolds hopes to become a garden designer, and lands a job with celebrity florist Charlotte Heavey, who takes Mary to the Chelsea Flower Show but also rips off her ideas about the power of the wilderness. Mary enters the 2002 Chelsea show in her own right. She seeks out maverick botanist Christy Collard to help with construction, even following him to his reforestation project in Ethiopia. Romance blossoms. Christy and his crew help Mary with her project. She takes top prize at the show.

The Fencer

Finland/Germany/Estonia 2015
Director: Klaus Härö

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Finnish cinema often seems synonymous with the Kaurismäki brothers, but since 2002 their younger compatriot Klaus Härö has been building a solid critical reputation, thanks to a series of films mostly revolving around controversial mid-20th-century historical events. For instance, *Mother of Mine* (2005) was about the WWII evacuation of urban Finnish children to rural Sweden, while *The New Man* (2007) was set in a female workhouse against a backdrop of a real-life eugenics programme. Although he tends to favour a conventional narrative approach (with 2009's starkly Bergman-esque *Letters to Father Jacob* an exception that suggests a more distinctive talent), Härö has a real gift for drawing out compelling performances, especially from children, and has a particularly good eye for landscape.

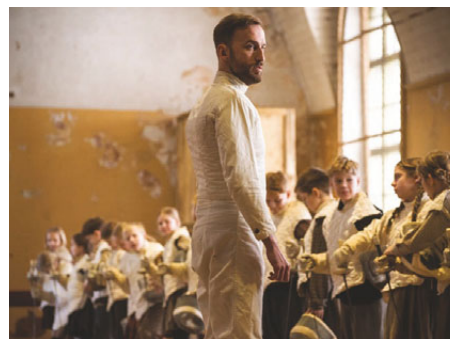
All these traits are apparent in his fifth feature, which tells the true story of Endel Nelis (Märt Avandi, a local star better known for comedic parts), a former fencing champion forced by initially murky political circumstance to take a job in the Estonian seaside town of Haapsalu in 1952. Correctly sensing frustration with the school's lack of facilities, he draws on his own skill set to open a fencing club, which is an immediate hit with children who otherwise have grim home lives (parental 'disappearances' being rife in the final months of Stalin's rule), although this puts him at odds with a head teacher (Hendrik Toompere) who vets all school activities to assess whether they're appropriately proletarian. Even when told by the grizzled grandfather (Lembit Ufsak) of one of Endel's star pupils that Karl Marx was also a keen fencer in his youth, the head insists on putting the fencing club to a popular vote at a parents' meeting, and is sufficiently annoyed by the near-unanimous result to ask one of his underlings to investigate Endel's background.

Sensibly, Härö doesn't over-egg the political

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Kai Nordberg Kaarle Aho	Production Designer Jaagup Toomet	Companies Making Movies, Kick Film, Allfilm present in co-production with BR, ARTE, YLE, ERR Sponsored by Haapsalu, Auto Forte, Corona, Tradehouse Funded by Eurimages, Eesti Kultuurkapital, Nordisk Film, FFF Bayern, The Finnish Film Foundation,	Deutscher Filmförderfonds, KMS, European Film Institute	Lembit Ufsak Joan's grandfather Liisa Koppel Marta Joonas Koff Joan Kirill Käro Alexey Egert Kadastu Toomas Ann-Lisett Rebane Lea	In Colour [2.35:1] Subtitles Distributor Studiocanal Limited Finnish theatrical title Miekkailija
Producers Jörg Bundschuh Ivo Felt	Music Gert Wilden Jr				
Script Anna Heinämaa Cinematography Tuomo Hutri	Sound Design Peter Riegel Maik Siegle				
Editing Tambet Tasuja Ueli Christen	Costume Designer Tiina Kaukane				
	©Making Movies, Kick Film, Allfilm				
	Production				
				Cast Märt Avandi Endel Nelis Ursula Ratasepp Kadri Hendrik Toompere principal	

Haapsalu, Estonia, 1952. Endel Nelis, self-exiled from Leningrad, begins work as a school sports teacher. Keen to exploit his own particular specialism, he starts a school fencing club, initially equipping it with foils made from sticks. It is hugely popular with the pupils, in Marta's case because it provides a substitute for ballet (there is no local ballet school), in Jaan's because it's a family tradition via his grandfather. Opposed to what he sees as an insufficiently proletarian pastime, the school's head teacher tries to shut the club down but is outvoted by parents. Endel is visited by former coach Aleksei, who procures the club second-hand fencing equipment while advising Endel to avoid Leningrad. The head teacher discovers that Endel is an official 'enemy of the people', thanks to Nazi connections.



Point of honour: Märt Avandi

pudding; the film's Estonian audience would be well aware of the country's longstanding loathing for both Nazi and Soviet occupiers, and would have likely predicted Endel's defence against a charge of Nazi collaboration long before he explains that he was compulsorily conscripted. It adds a layer of intrigue to an otherwise fairly standard-issue triumph-over-adversity saga – although rousing enjoyable, as soon as the finale ends up pitting a small blonde Estonian girl against a much taller Muscovite boy who's clearly had more expensive training and has better equipment, the eventual outcome and the associated symbolism could hardly be more obvious. Härö has previously made a film directly for children (2002's *Elina: As If I Wasn't There*) that was a fair bit subtler than this.

However, working with the same cinematographer (Tuomo Hutri) who shot *Letters to Father Jacob*, Härö keeps his visual strengths well to the fore (he takes particular advantage of Haapsalu's location on the Baltic coastline), and some attractive central performances make things briskly watchable. Fencers have also praised the film's technical accuracy, though the competition uses a modern scoring system to make the fast-moving final bouts instantly graspable by lay viewers. **S**

Endel tells fellow teacher Kadri, with whom he has an increasingly close relationship, that he was forcibly conscripted in German-occupied Estonia. Impressed by his charges' progress, Endel enters them in a Leningrad-based all-Soviet fencing competition, despite the personal risk. He picks Jaan, Toomas and Lea, appointing Marta the team substitute. After the team narrowly escapes disqualification for lacking electric foils (Endel borrows them from a friendly Armenian team), round one begins. Jaan and Toomas win on points, Lea narrowly loses, but they still go through. When Jaan twists his ankle, an apprehensive Marta takes over in the final bout against the star Moscow fencer. Despite several setbacks she prevails, and Haapsalu wins the contest. Endel and Kadri are reunited on the Haapsalu station platform.

The First Monday in May

USA 2016

Director: Andrew Rossi

Certificate 12A 90m 33s

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

Andrew Rossi's enjoyable documentary purports to lift the lid on the inner workings of New York's biggest annual fashion event, the Met Gala, and the couture exhibition that it notionally introduces. In reality, these two enterprises share little except a venue and a theme: the gala, produced under the stern auspices of *Vogue* editor-in-chief Anna Wintour, is a red-carpet extravaganza rivalled only by *Vanity Fair*'s Oscar after-party; the exhibition, curated by Andrew Bolton, is supposed to be a serious study of fashion as art. Bolton and Wintour, both Brits by birth, make a curious double act. Brand Wintour has long since completed her transformation into a lacquered icon sporting a helmet of immovable hair and an armour-plating of sequins. Bolton, in contrast, has a diffident, public-school air about him, and favours tailoring that finishes just above the ankle, making him look as if he might need some new trousers next term. Both, though, are talented and relentlessly ambitious, and it's interesting to see their differing tactics at work, with Bolton clipping on a charming smile and passive-aggressively sticking to his guns, while Wintour fells her opponents with a single eye-roll.

Followers of art and fashion will already know that the exhibition in question, 2015's *China: Through the Looking Glass*, turned out to be a blockbuster, but Rossi skilfully manages to inject some jeopardy into proceedings by focusing on the accusations of cultural insensitivity that inevitably arise from a show about western fashion's responses to Asian culture. Rossi gives plenty of airtime to these concerns – which are raised both by the museum's director of Asian art and by a Chinese journalist who interviews Wintour and Bolton in Beijing – but the question is never satisfactorily resolved. In fact, Bolton wants to have it both ways: when he's justifying the place of fashion in an art museum, he stresses that it engages aesthetically with lived experience; when experts on China balk at visual clichés involving Ming vases and Mao suits, he retorts that, after all, fashion is fantasy.

The film's more serious problem – apart from the uncritical inclusion of John Galliano,



Dress rehearsal: *The First Monday in May*

who is still a pariah after his 2011 "I love Hitler" rant – is the lack of input from Wong Kar Wai, who was the exhibition's artistic director but barely features in the film. Perhaps this was a question of access (the film is co-produced by *Vogue* publisher Condé Nast, which may explain Wintour's dominance), but it doesn't help the air of orientalism that inevitably hangs over proceedings.

Once the celebrity juggernaut rolls in, though, art and politics inevitably get pushed aside, and the final 20 minutes of the film duly wallow in regulation A-list pixie dust. Yet time and again, Rossi returns to what is perhaps his real subject: the world of work and how successful people function within it. While the stars are arriving in their carefully curated outfits, he catches Bolton anxiously touring the finished galleries, tweaking a fold here and a ruffle there. Outside, it's all porcelain veneers and tit tape, but at the heart of the matter there is a mesmerising study of absolute, meticulous focus. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Fabiola Beracasa
Beckman
Sylvana Ward Durrett
Dawn Ostroff

Producers

Matthew Weaver
Skot Bright

Story Consultant

Kate Novack

Cinematography

Andrew Rossi
Bryan Sarkinen

Edited by

Chad Beck
Andrew Coffman

Original Music

Ian Hultquist
Sofia Hultquist

Supervising

Sound Editors
Abigail Savage
Tom Efinger

©MB Productions,
LLC

Production

Companies

Relativity Studios
& Planted Projects

present in association

with Condé Nast

Entertainment, Sarah

Arison Productions,

Media Weaver

Entertainment a

Fabiola Beracasa

Beckman production

of an Andrew

Rossi film

Produced in

association

with Farfetch

Executive Producers

Sarah Arison

Jason Beckman

Josh Braun

Nancy Chilton

Ryan Kavanaugh

Tucker Tooley

Film Extracts

The Shanghai

Gesture (1941)

Shanghai Express

(1932)

Ba Wang Bie Ji/

Farewell My

Concubine (1993)

Huayang Nianhua/

In the Mood for

Love (2000)

In Colour

[178:1]

Distributor

Dogwoof

A documentary following preparations for 'China: Through the Looking Glass', an exhibition at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2015, and the celebrity-studded gala opening that is the primary fundraiser for the museum's Costume Institute. While chief curator Andrew Bolton struggles to fuse fashion and classical art in a way that will please both constituencies, 'Vogue' editor-in-chief Anna Wintour – who is the Costume Institute's co-chair – brings her organisational skills to bear on the biggest fashion party of the year. Meanwhile film director Wong Kar Wai attempts to anchor proceedings in the realities of modern China. Bolton's main problem is persuading the museum's head of Asian art to let him take over his galleries for a display of fashion, and this leads to protracted debates about cultural appropriation and disrespect, which are echoed when Bolton and Wintour travel to Beijing to drum up publicity for the show. Interviewees including Baz Luhrmann, Karl Lagerfeld and the controversial John Galliano explain why fashion is important. Both the gala and exhibition are pronounced record-breaking successes.

Free State of Jones

USA/People's Republic of China/

Republic of Korea 2016

Director: Gary Ross

Reviewed by Kim Newman

The theme of *Free State of Jones* is established potently early on, as Matthew McConaughey's Newton Knight carries his wounded nephew, a teenager essentially kidnapped into the Confederate army, to a medical tent and is told that only officers are being treated for their injuries – whereupon the boy dies, along with the other bleeding enlisted men piled up outside. It's repeatedly (too repeatedly) stressed that the wealthy slave-owners of the American South are not personally fighting the war that aims to protect their interests – instead it's the poor whites who are systematically being robbed and sacrificed to uphold a system in which they have no stake.

The historical Newton Knight had more skin in the game than McConaughey's. Though his branch of the family owned no slaves, Knight was the grandson of the owner of the largest slave plantation in Jones County, Mississippi. Here, this connection goes unmentioned and the representative 'master' is James Eakins (Joe Chrest), a hissable, wily exploiter and rapist who prospers after Abolition by kidnapping former slaves (and their children) and signing them up as unpaid 'apprentices'. The historical fact that Knight was simultaneously married to a white woman and a freed slave and had many children by both (only a representative two make the movie) is also weirdly glossed over by writer-director Gary Ross (*Pleasantville*, *The Hunger Games*). Until late in the film, Keri Russell's long-suffering Serena, who has one farm burned by the Confederates and another by the Union army, is presented as if she were Knight's sister, while Gugu Mbatha-Raw's medically skilled house slave is plainly his true love. A moment of bonding between the women at a spinning wheel is all Ross manages in exploring what must have been a complicated relationship. The script works overtime to big up Knight as an all-round hero, no matter that he's a bigamous deserter and ruthless guerrilla – which hobbles McConaughey, who has to mute his propensity for mischief to project resolute integrity.

For two-thirds of its 139 minutes, this is essentially a remake of *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, with swamps instead of Sherwood Forest, raids against tithe-gatherers commanded by a Sheriff of Nottingham substitute (a racist judge after the war), Mbatha-Raw as Maid Marian, and a collection of freed slaves and renegade whites as the Merry Men. The film's best sequence is a typical Robin Hood stunt, as a trap is set for Knight at the funeral of a family murdered by the King John-like Colonel Hood but a counter-trap is sprung with grieving widows 



Matthew McConaughey, Mahershala Ali

pulling guns and outlaws bursting out of coffins to shoot at the outclassed troops. Capping this, Knight pursues the wounded Hood into a church and throttles him with his belt. In this stretch, the film doesn't quite lose pomposity but does approximate a reasonably entertaining western – Knight's story was the inspiration for George Marshall's hokum oater *Tap Roots* (1948), which starred Van Heflin and an oddly cast Boris Karloff as an Indian chief.

After the war there's enough material for two or three more films – shortest shrift is given to the '85 years later' court case that the film cuts back to several times – but Ross's energies seem to run out. Aside from a bushy-bearded McConaughey, no one gets screen time enough to be more than a cliché. It comes as a surprise in the end credits to discover that many of the supporting characters even have names. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Scott Stuber Jon Kilik Gary Ross	One Entertainment, Union Investment Partners, Vendian Entertainment	'Newt' Gugu Mbatha-Raw
Screenplay Gary Ross	A Bluegrass Films/ Rahway Road/Larger than Life production	Rachel Mahershala Ali
Story Leonard Hartman Gary Ross	A film by Gary Ross	Moses Washington Keri Russell
Director of Photography Benoît Delhomme	Executive Producers Robin Bissell Leonard Feder	Serena Knight Christopher Berry
Edited by Juliette Welfling Pamela Martin	Producers Bruce Nacibar T.G. Herrington	Jasper Collins Sean Bridgers
Production Designer Philip Messina	Wang Zhongjun Wang Zhonglei	Will Sumrall Jacob Lofland
Music Nicholas Britell	Jerry Ye	Daniel Knight Thomas Francis
Sound Mixer Pud Cusack	Donald Tang	Murphy Colonel Elias Hood
Costume Designer Louise Frogley	Lee Jea Woo	Bill Tangradi Lt. Barbour
Stunt Co-ordinator Garrett Warren	Chris Lytton	Brian Lee Franklin Davis Knight
	Robert Simonds	Kerry Cahill Mary, yeoman farmer
	Adam Fogelson	Joe Chrest James Eakins
	Oren Aviv	Jessica Collins Annie
	Christopher Woodrow	In Colour [1.85:1]
	Michael Bassick	Distributor Studiocanal Limited
	Cast Matthew McConaughey Newton Knight,	

Jones County, Mississippi, 1862. Having deserted from the Confederate army to bring his nephew's body home to his family, ex-blacksmith Newton Knight organises poor farmers in resisting unfair confiscations of food and property. After his farm is burned down in reprisal, Newt leaves his wife Serena and hides in the swamp, where he befriends runaway slave Moses and begins a relationship with house slave Rachel. Forming a militia, Newt resists the efforts of the Confederate army to bring the county under control. Colonel Hood offers an amnesty to anyone who leaves the militia, but hangs the few who come out of the swamp. In response, Newt stages an ambush, personally killing Hood. Newt declares the county to be the Free State of Jones. After the war ends and slavery is abolished, diehard Confederates form the Ku Klux Klan and resist change – murdering Moses for registering free black men for the vote. Newt lives with Rachel and Serena and their children, and continues to campaign for social reform.

Eighty-five years later, one of Newt's descendants by Rachel marries a white woman and is convicted of miscegenation, but his case contributes to the eventual overturn of Mississippi's race laws.

Gary Numan Android in La La Land

United Kingdom 2016
Directors: Steve Read, Rob Alexander
Certificate 15 84m 59s

Reviewed by Sam Davies

"I'll never be a Bowie, I'll never be an Eno," sang Bill Callahan way back in 1994 on an early Smog song; "I'll only ever be a Gary Numan." In the early 1990s, Numan was a punchline – a one-trick pony and two-hit wonder ('Cars' and 'Are 'Friends' Electric?'). Where a Bowie or an Eno could spin the wheel of reinvention with every album, Numan had spun it once and got stuck in 1979, moving from punk also-ran to a kind of thunderously suburban take on Kraftwerk's synth-driven futurism. But since the millennium, Numan has been quietly revisited and rehabilitated, sampled and reworked by Sugababes, Armand Van Helden, Basement Jaxx, Ladytron, Trent Reznor and numerous others. *Gary Numan: Android in La La Land* is a film about his current predicament, caught in a kind of limbo: well known, often cited, but no longer a big seller. It switches between the present day, in which Numan is seen struggling to complete what he hopes will be a major comeback album while relocating to Los Angeles, and an account of his initial success and subsequent burnout.

The history lesson is highly entertaining. Numan relates how his entire reinvention as a synth-etic android spun off from a chance encounter with a Moog left on a particular setting – the rich, roaring tone famous from 1979's *Replicas*. And there are moments of pure bathos to cherish in Numan's recollections of his fame, such as the dinghy he blew up in his mansion and then could never be bothered to deflate, even though it filled a room, or the kitchen in which he only cooked chips for a year. Debut directors Steve Read and Rob Alexander rather riskily attempt to document Numan's creative process – risky because as so often, this amounts to someone sitting, frowning, in a studio. But it does pay off when Numan explains how he writes his lyrics – which always come after the music – using an elaborate personal notation system for melodies into which he slots words of the correct syllabic length.

The format that lies behind *Android in La La Land* is reality TV – and specifically MTV's turn-of-millennium hit *The Osbournes*. The dynamics are almost weirdly similar: like Ozzy, Gary is the cult singer and breadwinner, past his career peak, slightly lost in the bustle of daily family life. His wife Gemma – the couple famously met when she was running the official Numan fan club – is the Sharon Osbourne: outspoken, hard-nosed, heart of gold. When a hard drive containing Numan's new album seems to have been damaged on a transatlantic flight, Gemma coolly whips out a soldering iron and patches it



Family guy: Gary Numan

together. The family's relocation to Los Angeles only ups the Osbourne quotient, even down to the house they choose: a classic pile of LA gothic, complete with secret passages and mock Tudor panelling, which they quickly fill with pets.

The reality-TV framing becomes a drag when Read and Alexander try to inject some 'jeopardy'. (Will Gary finish his new album? Will it relaunch him as an artist?) But the total honesty with which both Gary and Gemma talk about their past is disarming, as they detail depressive episodes, parental fallouts, struggles with alcohol, Asperger's syndrome and their difficulties in conceiving their three daughters. It's as if a switch has been flicked from Numan's compulsive shyness of the 1980s to a compulsive mode of full disclosure.

Read and Alexander's direction is always efficient – it can't be easy to remain an unobtrusive fly on the wall while following a Numan family road-trip in a recreational vehicle. One flashier touch that does work is the camera they attach, upside down, to the underside of Numan's tour bus. The simple inversion of the American landscape, with desert freeways flashing past above cavernous skies, gives the vertiginous feeling of hanging off the bottom of the planet, and subtly conveys Numan's sense of himself as an alien. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

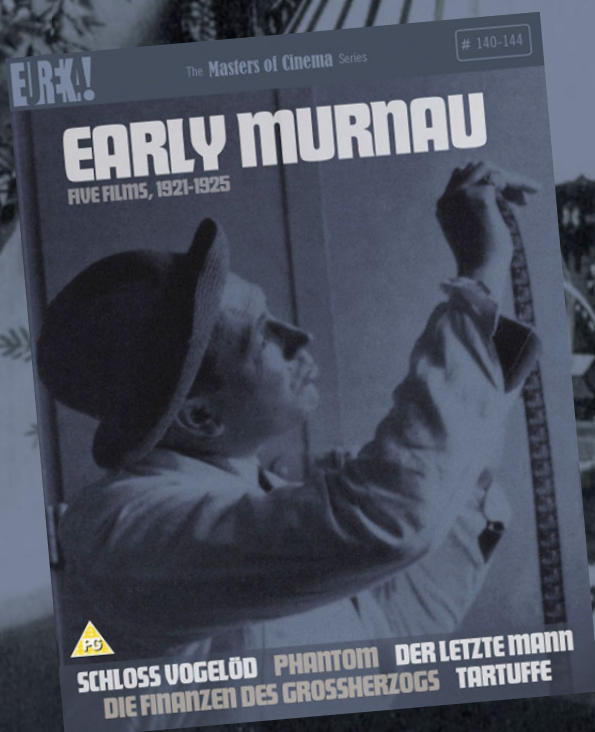
Produced by Rob Alexander	Production Companies A perfectmotion picture in association with Machine Music & Faction Films	Nadine Luque Mike Connolly Brad Shenfeld Ian Davies Rebecca Long
Filed by Steve Read	A film by Steve Read and Rob Alexander	In Colour [1.85:1]
Edited by Ollie Huddleston	Executive Producers Sylvia Stevens Caroline Spry	Distributor perfectmotion ltd
Sound Rob Alexander Steve Read		

A documentary following synth-pop pioneer Gary Numan, his wife and their three young daughters as they decide to relocate to Los Angeles to relaunch his career. Scenes of Numan writing and recording his new album are interspersed with the story of his immense success at the turn of the 1980s and subsequent decline into bankruptcy, told through interviews with Numan and his parents. His more recent struggles with depression and a career in the doldrums are discussed by his wife Gemma and musical collaborators.

EARLY MURNAU

FIVE FILMS, 1921-1925

SCHLOSS VOGELÖD PHANTOM DIE FINANZEN DES GROSSHERZOGS
DER LETZTE MANN TARTUFFE



SPECIAL EDITION BOX SET OF FIVE FILMS ACCOMPANIED BY A 100-PAGE BOOK
AVAILABLE ON BLU-RAY FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE WORLD THIS AUGUST.

EUREKA!
www.mastersofcinema.org

The
Masters of Cinema
Series



@mastersofcinema
@eurekavideo

AVAILABLE FROM
amazon.co.uk

The Greasy Strangler

United Kingdom/USA/New Zealand/Australia 2016
Director: Jim Hosking

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

"You're such a gross-out, Dad. I think I might barf," says manchild Big Brayden (Sky Elobar) in the opening sequence of *The Greasy Strangler*. Sporting nothing more than thick-rimmed glasses, a desperate comb-over and underpants, Brayden has just heard his similarly near-naked father, the sly, silver-haired Big Ronnie (Michael St Michaels), wondering aloud why people do not put grease instead of milk in their coffee. In the dilapidated home that they share, father-son tensions are evident. "You probably think I'm the Greasy Strangler," confides Ronnie. "Tell you a secret: I *am* the Greasy Strangler."

Despite Ronnie's all-out obsession with oily fat, his war on dry food and his declared desire to "lubricate the world", Brayden prefers, at least at first, to think of his father as a "bullshit artist" and not the mysterious, grease-covered figure who has been gruesomely murdering people at night. The phrase 'bullshit artist' becomes a recurrent motif in the film, directed mostly at Ronnie but also at Brayden. Sure enough, Ronnie is prone to fabrication, whether in the information he dishes out on the disco-themed walking tours of LA that he and Brayden conduct together, or in the namedropping narratives that he tells about his past. Yet from early on we know two things: that lecherous, cranky Ronnie really is the Greasy Strangler, taking bestial vengeance on all who mildly annoy him; and that barf-inducing excess is very much on the agenda.

In a film that uses a barebones slasher format to frame its Oedipal psychodrama, the crude, appetitive, flatulent Ronnie plays the rampaging id to Brayden's restrained ego. While the virginal son sweetly romances the more experienced Janet (Elizabeth De Razzo), his sidelined father goes a-killing – yet when Brayden's (prosthetic) micropenis risks being inadequate for Janet, Ronnie dives in with his grotesquely outsized member (that "looks like a massive mouse's head") and



Like father: Sky Elobar, Elizabeth De Razzo

takes over. A bizarre, possibly schizophrenic love triangle emerges, but ultimately there can only be two in this relationship, and Brayden finds himself torn between Janet, Ronnie and his own inner Greasy Strangler.

Director/co-writer Jim Hosking revels in offering a skew-whiff view of the strange world that his even stranger characters inhabit – conjured from the passive smoke of Russ Meyer, John Waters and even Alejandro Jodorowsky (at his most Freudian). In this priapic parade of wrongness, littered with gross-out gags and outré transgressions, urges are base, lines are jaw-dropping and all the lowest tastes are eventually catered to – while Andrew Hung's 80s-aping synth score provides the perfect cheesy accompaniment to Ronnie's love of "creamy cocktails". Yet beneath the surreal stylisation remains a rich story of a divided self. For as abused, 'manic-depressive' (as Big Ronnie puts it) Brayden belatedly comes of age by adopting his questionable legacy and, finally, fully becoming his father's son, *The Greasy Strangler* proves to be a patriarchal *Psycho* (1960) by way of *Fight Club* (1999), with more than a touch of post-Troma-tic unhingedness. 🍷

Hell or High Water

USA 2016
Director: David Mackenzie
Certificate 15 101m 49s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

They still wear cowboy hats and carry guns, but the continuity between today's Texas heartland and the mythic western landscape that looms large in the American psyche may now be largely symbolic, if the stringent times faced by Chris Pine's family ranch are anything to go by. The property will soon belong to the bank unless sufficient funds are forthcoming – which prompts Pine and his volatile ex-con sibling Ben Foster to summon the outlaw spirit of yore and rob a string of the very same bank's branches to raise the cash. From Wild West to current malaise, there's a strong sense of Texan cultural history making its imprint on this crime thriller, which is cannily pitched so that the audience will likely have more sympathy for the renegade protagonists than for the acquisitive financial institutions that have gained such rich pickings from the area's recent downturn.

Not that Jeff Bridges's veteran Texas ranger is one for such moral ambiguities. He's the sort of man for whom right and wrong are still in the same place they always were. And Bridges here delivers another masterly late-period character study of a steely, wise old-stager whose abrasive banter with his Native American-Mexican partner Gil Birmingham masks deep affection and loyalty. In this instance, the law's no fool, and it doesn't take Bridges that long to twig the pattern of the robberies, as volatile Foster's trigger-happy behaviour causes Pine's meticulous plans to unravel. There's plenty of nifty procedural action, too – the brothers visiting the nearest casino, for instance, to buy up chips with their ill-gotten gains and then cash them in for untraceable notes – thus giving the piece's heist-flick elements a spring in their step. However, as was also evident in actor-turned-screenwriter Taylor Sheridan's previous cross-border drugs thriller *Sicario* (2015), it's ultimately a thorough investment in the whys and wherefores of place that makes this particular offering so satisfying and distinctive.

There's an early scene, for instance, where taciturn Pine shows Foster the now empty room where he tended to their terminally ill mother while the latter was in jail, the virtually derelict remainder of the ranch betraying a long losing battle still very much readable in Pine's revelatory performance. Here's a character not disposed to giving much away – indeed, director David Mackenzie adeptly plays one key emotional moment as he looks away from the camera entirely – but Pine lets us know that his sense of criminal purpose comes from a simmering anger and resentment at having played his life by the rules only to find himself with nothing to show for it. Elsewhere, as the camera travels through small towns peppered with vacant retail units, and Nick Cave and Warren Ellis's score delivers its own knowing take on honky-tonk melancholy, we certainly sense a bitterness in the air from communities feeling left behind.

This in turn might help to explain how the mythology of the gun-toting, self-determining cowboy still holds such appeal in these parts. Perhaps the most memorable sequence of all, and one possibly betraying the directorial sensibility of an outsider confounded by the resilience of America's ongoing gun culture, has the two

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Andy Starke
Ant Timpson
Daniel Noah
Josh Waller
Elijah Wood
Writers
Toby Harward
Jim Hosking
Director of Photography
Marten Tedin
Editor
Mark Burnett
Production Designer
Jason Kisvarday
Music
Andrew Hung
Sound Designer
Martin Pavey
Costume Designer
Christina Blackaller

©The British Film Institute/Greasy Strangler LLC
Production Companies
A Greasy Strangler LLC production
Presented by

SpectreVision/
Drafthouse Films/
Rook Films/Timpson
Films/Madman
Entertainment
and BFI
Made with the
support of the
BFI's Film Fund
Executive Producers
Mary Burke
Tim League
Ben Wheatley
Theo Brooks

Cast

Michael St Michaels
Big Ronnie
Sky Elobar
Big Brayden
Elizabeth De Razzo
Janet
Gil Gex
Big Paul
Joe David Walters
Oinker
Sam Dissanayake
Indian tourist
Abdoulaye N'Gom
Senegalese tourist

Holland MacFallister
Scandinavian tourist
Mel Kohl
hot dog vendor
Carl Solomon
Danny the crooner
Sal Koussa
Ricky Prickles
Dana Haas
Big Heine
Jesse Keen
Big Thaddeus

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Picturehouse
Entertainment

Los Angeles, present day. Virginal manchild Brayden lives with his father Ronnie, decades after his mother left with abusive bodybuilder Ricky Prickles. On the disco tour that he runs with Ronnie, Brayden meets Janet. They start dating. By night, Ronnie covers himself in grease and becomes the Greasy Strangler, murdering those who annoy him – first some tourists, then a hot-dog vendor – before cleaning the grease off himself at the car wash owned by his blind friend Paul. After Ronnie also murders Brayden's best friend Oinker, Brayden tells Janet that he will investigate, expose and kill the Greasy Strangler himself. Brayden suspects that Ronnie is the killer. After going out dancing with Paul, Ronnie spends the night with Janet; the next morning he tells a crestfallen Brayden that he is dating her. She is torn between the two men. As the Greasy Strangler, Ronnie kills Paul. Brayden contacts a detective, Jody, and shows him grease found in Ronnie's room. Jody (in fact Ronnie in disguise) tells Brayden to end his enquiries, but Brayden is determined to expose the Greasy Strangler. Janet offers to help, and agrees to marry Brayden. Enraged, Ronnie evicts Brayden, storms off and returns as the Greasy Strangler, abducting Janet. Brayden covers himself in grease and helps Ronnie strangle Janet. Reconciled, father and son kill Ricky Prickles.

Hunt for the Wilderpeople

New Zealand / USA 2016

Director: Taika Waititi

Certificate 12A 101m 15s

Reviewed by Tim Hayes

The success of *What We Do in the Shadows* (2014) extended beyond its core audience of those who appreciate a good vampire sight gag and raised Taika Waititi's international profile to the point where Marvel has since come calling. But his natural beat in two previous films was a humane look at his native New Zealand's ethnographic landscape and internal cultural stresses – terrain replete with fractured Maori families, battered histories and much warmth if sardonic nobility of character. *Boy* (2010), in particular, was clear-eyed about the cultural makeup of its young protagonist's world, packing more than just comedy into details such as the three Maori children christened Dallas, Dynasty and Falcon Crest. *Shadows* pretended to have other things on its mind, but was still entirely concerned with minorities marginalised by circumstance and the pains of assimilation, not to mention the inevitability of watching loved ones die.

Hunt for the Wilderpeople is a canny expansion, in breadth if perhaps not in depth, of all these interests, and at its centre is another genial boy adrift in an unfair environment. Adapted by Waititi from *Wild Pork and Watercress* by author Barry Crump, it makes an odd couple out of the droll and rotund Ricky (Julian Dennison) and grizzled old goat Hec, an irascible bushman rendered impossible to dislike by virtue of the twinkle in Sam Neill's eye. One of these characters can tackle a wild boar in hand-to-hand combat, the other thrashes around in the bush wearing his baseball cap backwards before keeling over, but the parental bond that develops is no less crowd-pleasing for being preordained.

An escalation into a car chase complete with helicopters and headlights glinting in the New Zealand dusk is a bit less expected, but Waititi stages it with some relish, enjoying the visual vaudeville of whip pans and camera angles and nervous exasperation in a way that betrays an affection for films such as *Goodbye Pork Pie* (1981), *The Sugarland Express* (1974) and many points in between. The synth score is another pointer to an earlier era, though Waititi already has a fine ear for the unexpected music track: Leonard Cohen's 'The Partisan' is employed here for bathos, but it matches the bracing use of Norma Tanega's 'You're Dead' in *Shadows* for lively soundtracking. Affection for the sheer fun of performance also still thrives, in the mechanics of Rima Te Wiata's bottomless compassion as Aunt Bella as well as Waititi's own



Texas dangers: Ben Foster, Chris Pine

siblings riskily knocking off a larger bank branch at a time when it's filled with customers – the vast majority of whom are packing weapons. As the robbers take flight, these ordinary citizens spontaneously filter out into a posse/motorcade giving chase, the right to self-defence and the possibility of a restorative act of heroism seemingly hardwired into their DNA. However, as Foster whips out military-grade weaponry in response, and bullets find their target, we see the bloody, inevitable consequence of the right to bear arms: events turn into an outdoor standoff that is redolent of yesteryear's westerns and that powerfully plays off the character conflicts the story has laid in place with such care.

Mackenzie's calm sense of spatial coherence certainly pays rewards here, as it does throughout the movie's outbursts of action, always sinewy yet lucid and avoiding today's seeming default mode of handheld bluster. He also effectively trusts the underlying emotion in the writing, especially when it comes to the world-weary but very real bond between the two siblings, hanging back in reserve rather than crowding out his performers. He's a filmmaker who has worked his way through an array of genres and honed his skills as he's progressed, and the whole movie offers ample evidence that this oft-undervalued Scot has stealthily achieved an unassuming but utterly genuine mastery of his craft. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Sidney Kimmel
Peter Berg
Carla Hacken
Julie Yorn
Written by
Taylor Sheridan
Director of Photography
Giles Nuttgens
Editor
Jake Roberts

Production Designer
Tom Duffield
Original Score
Nick Cave
Warren Ellis
Sound Mixer
Andrejs Prokopenko
Costume Designer
Malgosia Turzanska
©Coman Movie, LLC
Production

Companies
CBS Films,
Sidney Kimmel
Entertainment
and OddLot
Entertainment a Film
44, LBI Entertainment
production
A David
Mackenzie film
Executive Producers
Gigi Pritzker

Bill Lischak
Michael Nathanson
Rachel Shane
John Penotti
Bruce Toll
Cast
Jeff Bridges
Marcus Hamilton
Chris Pine
Toby Howard

Ben Foster
Tanner Howard
Gil Birmingham
Alberto Parker
Dale Dickey
Elsie
William Sterchi
Mr Clauson

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

West Texas, present day. Siblings Toby and ex-con Tanner rob a sleepy branch of the Texas Midland Bank before burying their getaway car at a remote location. The money is needed to stop the very same bank foreclosing on their late mother's ranch, whose value has rocketed with the discovery of oil on the land. The pair use a casino to exchange the stolen banknotes for untraceable cash. As their robberies continue, soon-to-retire Texas ranger Marcus and his partner Alberto begin to figure out the pattern behind the crimes. On the next job, volatile Tanner shoots one of the guards; the brothers then riskily take on a larger branch at a time when it's busy with customers. They

escape with the cash but are pursued by gun-toting citizens, who are subsequently sent running for cover when Tanner responds with a heavy automatic rifle. Tanner makes a last stand on high ground as police officers arrive, leaving Toby to finish the job alone. When Tanner kills Alberto, Marcus shoots him.

Toby deposits the money in time to prevent foreclosure on the ranch, assigning Texas Midland to administer the trust he has set up for his estranged children.

Months later, Marcus, now retired, visits Toby at the ranch to make clear that he knows exactly what he did. The two men reach an uneasy understanding.



Parental guidance: Sam Neill

cameo, playing a rambling minister tangled in the bush of his own theology. All of which makes *Wilderpeople* embody what comes naturally to this filmmaker – wry and accessible fables about lost souls with every reason to be embittered finding something else to do with their anguish instead. The prospect of an outright comedy director being dragooned into the Marvel Cinematic Universe after all those desultory dick jokes in *Deadpool* (2016) is a thoroughly mixed blessing, but perhaps Waititi's upcoming *Thor: Ragnarok* might be the film to embrace the melancholy of all those supermen with some understanding of how the metaphor ticks. And might then ginger it up with the editing rhythms of John Landis for good measure. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Carthew Neal Leanne Saunders Taika Waititi Matt Noonan Written by Taika Waititi Based on the book <i>Wild Pork and Watercress</i> written by Barry Crump Additional Writing Tearepa Kahi Cinematographer Lachlan Milne Editors Luke Haigh Tom Eagles Yana Gorskaya Production Designer Neville Stevenson Original Music Lukasz Buda Samuel Scott Conrad Wedde Sound Recordist Ande Schurr Costume Designer Kristin Seth ©Majestic Pictures Limited Production Companies Defender Films, Piki	Films & Curious Films present in association with the New Zealand Film Commission & NZ On Air a Taika Waititi film Developed with the assistance of the New Zealand Film Commission He Ara Scheme, Piki Produced with the assistance of Dolby Family Sound Fellowship Financed in association with Kiwibank Executive Producers James Wallace Charlie McCellan Cast Sam Neill Hec Julian Dennison Ricky Rima Te Wiata Bella Rachel House Paula Tioreore Ngatai-Melbourne	Kahu Oscar Kightley Andy Stan Walker Ron Mike Minogue Joe Cohen Holloway Hugh Rhys Darby Psycho Sam Troy Kingi TK Taika Waititi minister Hamish Parkinson Gavin Dolby Atmos In Colour [2.35:1] Distributor Vertigo Films
---	--	---

New Zealand, present day. Ricky, a troublesome foster child, is placed with kind-hearted Bella and her more aloof husband Hec at their home close to the bush. Bella gently bonds with Ricky, who comes to feel comfortable with the pair, but she dies shortly afterwards and a grieving Hec tells Ricky that he is not wanted. Ricky runs away into the bush. Hec, a skilled bushman though also illiterate, easily locates Ricky but then injures his ankle. The pair are forced to spend weeks in the bush while Hec recuperates, and they grow closer. Meanwhile overzealous social worker Paula launches an aggressive manhunt, believing that Hec has kidnapped the boy. On their return trek, Hec and Ricky evade some suspicious hunters, rescue a sick ranger and survive an encounter with a wild boar that kills Hec's beloved dog. Ricky meets laidback teenager Kahu and her genial father. The police corner Hec and Ricky, who escape with the help of eccentric bushman Psycho Sam, and a chase ensues before the pair are eventually caught.

Sometime later, Hec is released from custody, having started to learn to read. He is met by Ricky, who now lives with Kahu's family and is happily settled. Ricky asks if Hec wishes to join them; after due reflection, he agrees.

Imperium

USA 2016

Director: Daniel Ragussis

Certificate 15 108m 46s

Reviewed by Nikki Baughan

In the five years since he laid down his wand in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2*, Daniel Radcliffe has been on an earnest mission to shake off any trace of the boy wizard, choosing an eclectic range of roles intended to prove that he is a serious actor. Indeed, as evidenced by the likes of John Krokidas's *Kill Your Darlings*, in which he played a tormented Allen Ginsberg, or Alexandre Aja's *Horns*, which saw him turning into a devil, there's no doubt that Radcliffe is a performer of presence and range. But while these qualities are on display in white-supremacist drama *Imperium*, they are often overshadowed by heavy-handed filmmaking that unrelentingly puts issue before story.

Radcliffe, complete with convincing American accent, is introverted FBI agent Nate Foster who – as we see when he compassionately interrogates a black African terror suspect in the man's own language – is an intelligent and idealistic lawman. He is also a loner, spending his evenings alone, listening to classical music, which makes him a surprising choice to go undercover among the various white-supremacist groups – neo-Nazis, the KKK and racist militia – that are gaining ground on America's East Coast. But when FBI colleague Angela Zamparo (an underused Toni Collette) asserts that he is the perfect man for the job, Nate shaves his head, swots up an ex-military backstory and, through a combination of smart talking and quick wits, discovers that the supremacists are planning an explosive event in Washington.

Based on true events, and co-written by debut director Daniel Ragussis with ex-FBI agent Michael German, *Imperium* is aggressively authentic. As Nate confronts the hideous face of fascism, we are bombarded with images of violence and reminders of barbarity, from mugshots of Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh to, in one audacious moment, a Ku Klux Klan wedding ceremony in front of burning swastikas. No doubt intended to underline just how terrifying these people are, it amounts to an ideological bludgeoning.

Ragussis is so determined to drive home the (rather obvious) threat of modern white supremacy that any nuance is almost entirely absent, making *Imperium* an exercise in soapboxing rather than an evocative drama. Every character is rough-hewn, from the supremacists, the majority of whom are two-dimensional ciphers for a movement rather than individuals with their own motivations, to Nate, an alienated loner looking for a sense of belonging. And Zamparo – the only significant female character – is a familiar tough-talking agent determined to stand up to the big boys, both outside the bureau and within. It's difficult to connect to anyone on an intimate level, the film missing the emotional impetus that has driven other, more compelling works on the subject such as *American History X* (1998), *This Is England* (2006) or *Welcome to Leith* (2015).

Still, underneath all this bombast there are some interesting moments that come close to rounded insight. Despite inciting racial hatred on a daily basis, for example, rightwing radio host Dallas Wolf (Tracy Letts) feels that he is simply an entertainer. "I tell these jackasses what they want to hear and they worship me for it," he says, impervious to the galvanising faith his words inspire in those primed to believe them. Similarly, the character of Gerry (disarmingly played by Sam Trammell), a barbecue-giving, chino-wearing family man who is prepared to die in his fight against "the mud people", suggests that it is those hiding in plain sight who should be most feared.

These moments are strikingly resonant against the current American political and social landscape, with its increasingly legitimised manifesto of racism peddled by blowhard rightwing spokespeople. Sadly, however, these ideas are never fully realised, the complex themes reduced to a blunt-edged good-versus-evil narrative that runs out of steam before its underwhelming climax. Instead of being a powerful distillation of the human element of extremism, *Imperium* is a join-the-dots portrait of humanity's unending propensity for cruelty both in thought and deed. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Ty Walker Producers Simon Taufique Dennis Lee Daniel Ragussis Screenplay Daniel Ragussis Story Michael German Director of Photography Bobby Bukowski Edited by Sara Corrigan Production Designer Kristen Adams Music Will Bates	Production Sound Mixer William Britt Costume Designer Amy Andrews Harrell Stunt Co-ordinator Chad Hessler ©TDSO LLC (VA) Production Companies Lionsgate Premiere, Grindstone Entertainment Group, Atomic Features and Tycor International Film Company present in association	with Green-Light International, Sculptor Media LLC and Raven Capital Management an Atomic Features and Tycor International Film Company production in association with Green-Light International Produced in association with Raven Asset-Based Opportunity Fund III LP Executive Producers Warren T. Goz	Eric Gold Jeff Elliott Chad Moore Andrew Mann Lauren Selig Barry Brooker Stan Wertlieb Thomas Whiteman John Osborne Caroline Michael Osborne Cast Daniel Radcliffe Nate Foster Toni Collette Angela Zamparo Tracy Letts	Dallas Wolf Seth Numrich Roy Pawel Szajda Vince Sargent Devin Druid Johnny Chris Sullivan Andrew Blackwell Nestor Carbonell Tom Hernandez Burn Gorman Morgan Sam Trammell Gerry Conway In Colour [2.35:1]	Distributor Signature Entertainment
--	--	--	---	--	--

Washington DC, present day. Introverted FBI agent Nate Foster is recruited by fellow agent Angela Zamparo to go undercover and infiltrate the white supremacist groups who are gaining ground on the East Coast, brought together by the galvanising hate-speak of rightwing radio host Dallas Wolf.

Convinced that the groups are planning a major act of terrorism, Nate grows ever closer to key figures in the movement to obtain information. Winning their trust, he learns of an imminent Washington bomb plot and races to stop it, managing to stall the perpetrators until the FBI arrives.

The Infiltrator

United Kingdom/USA 2016
Director: Brad Furman
Certificate 15 127m 7s

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

How to follow a breakthrough fictional role so pop-culturally pervasive – *Breaking Bad*'s Walter White – that your antiheroic visage appears on department-store T-shirts, mugs and bath salts that resemble crystal meth? For Bryan Cranston, the immediate solution has been to tackle real-life figures: blacklisted screenwriter Dalton Trumbo in last year's biopic; Lyndon B. Johnson in a recent HBO portrait; and now, in *The Infiltrator*, Pablo Escobar-chasing undercover agent Robert Mazur. A veteran of domestic sting operations, Mazur posed as high-rolling Tampa money launderer Bob Musella to gain access to the upper echelons of Escobar's financiers, in so doing bringing down one of the kingpin's top lieutenants and scandalising the crooked Bank of Credit and Commerce International.

Drawn from Mazur's 2009 memoir, Brad Furman's film is a solidly crafted if hardly imaginative true-crime thriller, albeit possessing a breezier gait to the director's *The Lincoln Lawyer* (2011). While its title may be redolent of a Cannon Films exploitation quickie from the mid-80s – the timeframe for Mazur's exploits – Furman thankfully avoids wallowing in period kitsch. The Furmans structure their narrative as a series of increasingly dangerous auditions, as Mazur labours to refine and perfect the amoral Musella persona for an ever watchful – and ruthless – audience. But unlike anything-goes colleague Emir (John Leguizamo), this principled family man has his limits. Unwilling to be unfaithful to his wife, Mazur bemuses a debauched gaggle of cartel lackeys by announcing that he has a fiancée, a slip-up that necessitates Diane Kruger's rookie field agent to enter the fray as Musella's bride-to-be.

The latter proves a supremely confident accomplice, especially when Mazur finally wins the trust of Escobar's urbane moneyman Roberto Alcaino (Benjamin Bratt). As Mazur's travails become murkier, his double life – and Cranston's performance – inevitably recalls that of Walter White and monstrous alter ego Heisenberg. Here, though, Mazur retains his



Better call Bob: Bryan Cranston, John Leguizamo

moral compass, even as he's forced into wildly uncharacteristic behaviour. It's another deft, focused showing from Cranston, once again playing a man who's constantly performing but who this time doesn't disappear into the role.

Recently, Escobar projects across film, TV and literature have seemed to arrive with the frequency of a Medellín cartel cocaine shipment. *The Infiltrator* skirts around potential audience fatigue by barely featuring Escobar himself, save for a fleeting glimpse in a hotel lobby. Front and centre in Netflix's sprawling *Narcos*, he's a vaporous threat in the distance here. Furman Sr incorporates a hefty array of his underlings into her script, some of them registering more than others. Of these, Yul Vázquez's dissipated, Warhol-like accountant is a standout, while *This Is England*'s Joe Gilgun does good work as a helpful jailbird on Mazur's payroll. There's an undeniably shopworn air to some of the mob/spy-movie business – scenes of violent squabbles between scuzzy henchmen tend to go through the motions. Still, a handful of tense sequences offers greater rewards: a bizarre voodoo initiation rite that Mazur endures to meet a prized target; an anniversary dinner that unravels when Mazur is spotted by his new cartel buddies. These stranger-than-fiction moments help to elevate what's an efficient enough vehicle for Cranston, but *The Infiltrator* suggests there's limited mileage left in the 'my undercover hell' yarn. Ⓢ

Kubo and the Two Strings

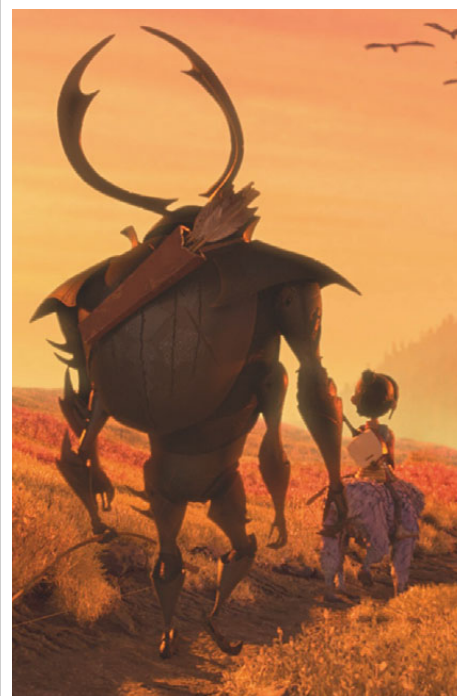
USA 2016
Director: Travis Knight

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

Stop-motion specialists Laika are not a prolific outfit – this is only their fourth release since 2009 – but their films tend to garner Oscar nominations and critical plaudits whenever they appear. This latest ticks all the Laika boxes, with gorgeous stop-motion animation brilliantly deployed to tell the tale of a misfit boy who slips between mundane reality and the world of magic. If it's nowhere near as dark as 2009's *Coraline*, it has a definite spooky undertow that nicely offsets its perky moral message about love and family, while its mythical Japanese setting lends the visual design an air of understated elegance and offers the opportunity – seized with both hands by CEO-turned-director Travis Knight – to do some jaw-droppingly beautiful things with paper lanterns.

Young Kubo (voiced by Art Parkinson) is the one-eyed magical boy who is sent on a quest to discover what has happened to his long-lost samurai dad and work out why he is being pursued by two witchy sisters (Rooney Mara) and their father, the evil Moon King (Ralph Fiennes). Kubo is accompanied by a talking monkey (Charlize Theron) and a strong but dumb warrior-beetle (Matthew McConaughey) he meets along the way; the comically bickering trio must discover what binds them together (not hard to guess) in time for Kubo to vanquish the forces of darkness with the power of his music, magic and storytelling.

It's true that there's nothing particularly novel about this quest plot, and in fact the beautifully restrained opening scenes, which establish Kubo's life as the lonely carer of his sickly, vulnerable mother and show him eking a living as a storytelling busker in the local village, could have been the start of a very different movie. In a sense, though, ancient archetypes are the real subject of the film, which shows how Kubo himself comes alive, along with the origami figures he animates with his



Play it again, Samurai: Kubo and the Two Strings

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Miriam Segal
Produced by
Brad Furman
Don Sikorski
Paul Brennan

Screenplay

Ellen Brown Furman
Based on the book
by Robert Mazur

Director of Photography

Joshua Reis

Editors

David Rosenbloom
Luis Carballar
Jeff McEvoy

Production Designer

Crispian Sallis

Original Music

Chris Hajian

Production Sound Mixer

Robert Sharman

Costume Designer

Dinah Collin

©Infiltrator Films Ltd
Production

Companies

A Good Films
production
Executive
Produced by
Martin Rushton-
Turner
Executive Producers
Camela Galano
Peter Hampden
Norman Merry
Kate Fasulo
Jill Morris
Scott Lastaiti
Bryan Cranston
Robert Mazur
Film Extracts
Garden of Evil (1954)

Cast

Bryan Cranston
Robert Mazur,
'Bob Musella'
Diane Kruger
Kathy Ertz
John Leguizamo
Emir Abreu
Benjamin Bratt

Roberto Alcaino

Yul Vázquez

Javier Ospina

Amy Ryan

Bonni Tischler

Juliet Aubrey

Evelyn Mazur

Joseph Gilgun

Dominic

Michael Paré

Barry Seal

Elena Anaya

Gloria Alcaino

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Warner Bros. Pictures
International (UK)

Florida, 1985. Federal agent Robert Mazur goes undercover to investigate the finances of Colombian drug lord Pablo Escobar's Medellín cartel. Posing as money launderer Bob Musella, Mazur makes inroads with a Medellín crew based in Tampa. When he makes the mistake of telling them that he has a fiancée, fellow agent Kathy Ertz is drafted in to pose as Mazur's betrothed. Javier Ospina, Escobar's accountant, agrees to a partnership with Mazur but remains wary of the agent. Mazur launders the cartel's money via crooked bank BCCI. Mazur's commitment to the assignment estranges him from his wife Evelyn. He is almost killed when his informant, former Medellín drug runner Barry Seal, is assassinated by the cartel. Mazur and Kathy befriend Escobar's lieutenant Roberto Alcaino and his wife Gloria. Kathy visits Evelyn to assure her of her husband's fidelity. Mazur receives a threat to his family directly from Escobar when he stalls a payment request. Ospina discovers Mazur's duplicity but is murdered before he can reveal it. Mazur is furious when the DEA opts to snatch Alcaino during a cocaine shipment. Attending Mazur and Kathy's fake wedding, Alcaino, Gloria and other Escobar associates are seized by the FBI.

magical musical instrument, when he taps into the heroism and happy endings of samurai legend. The story he weaves for his spellbound audience turns into the story of his own life, and part of the growing-up process he must undergo involves the realisation that he has control over how things will turn out.

For adult audiences, the film's greatest pleasure is the sheer exuberance of the visual imagination on display. Mixing stop-motion with CGI elements gives Knight enormous scope to create towering seas and huge vistas, but it's the intricate touches that make the project so luxurious to watch: the hairline cracks in one witch's expressionless white mask; the flashes of personality displayed by a tiny paper warrior; and the stupendous stop-motion skeleton at the centre of a key battle scene, which is revealed to be an enormous feat of engineering in a post-credits peek into the painstaking work of making it come alive. Bring the kids if you like – your more timid tots might need a hand to hold for the witches' scenes – but this lovely film has plenty to offer adult animation fans too. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Arianne Sutner Travis Knight	Malcolm Lamont	Dolby Atmos In Colour [2.35:1]
Screenplay Marc Haims Chris Butler	Production Companies Focus Features, Laika	Distributor Universal Pictures International UK & Eire
Story Shannon Tindle Marc Haimés	Voice Cast Charlize Theron Mother	
Director of Photography Frank Passingham	Art Parkinson Kubo	
Edited by Christopher Murrie	Ralph Fiennes Moon King	
Production Designer Nelson Lowry	George Takei Hosato	
Music Dario Marianelli	Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa Hashi	
Supervising Sound Editor/Sound Designer Tim Chau	Brenda Vaccaro Kameyo	
Costume Designer Deborah Cook	Rooney Mara The Sisters	
Lead Animators Jason Stalman	Matthew McConaughey Beetle	

Ancient Japan. A young boy, Kubo, looks after his sick mother and earns money by telling stories in the local village, using her magic shamisen – a stringed instrument – to animate origami figures. His mother's only rule is that he must not stay out after dark, but one evening he disobeys her and is caught by her two evil sisters. His mother uses the last of her magic to save him, turning herself into a monkey and helping him to fly away on magic wings. Not recognising her at first, he grudgingly allows the monkey to guide him on his quest to find three pieces of magic armour which will protect him from the sisters and the wicked Moon King, who wants to blind him. Along the way they meet a bewitched samurai, Beetle, who is brave and strong. Together they find the armour, and gradually realise that Beetle is Kubo's long-lost father. In the final battle, Beetle is killed and Monkey is fatally wounded. Before dying she reveals that the Moon King is her father, who is seeking revenge because she disobeyed him by falling in love with a human. Kubo defeats him using the storytelling shamisen, and the Moon King transforms into a befuddled old man who is taken in by the villagers. They tell him that he is in fact a kindly and well-loved person, and he becomes what they tell him he is – proving the magical power of stories.

League of Gods

Director: Koan Hui
Certificate 12A 109m 23s

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

China is poised to overtake the US as the world's biggest film market and, despite a quota system which limits the number of American movies on Chinese screens, the communist government bridle at the imbalance between Hollywood's profits in China and the Chinese film industry's failure to crack world markets. How fortuitous, then, that Sony Pictures Corporation has stepped in to arrange an international release for one of China's most expensive visual-effects 'blockbusters' yet. *League of Gods* opened simultaneously in China, North America and the UK on 29 July, and in Australia and New Zealand the day before. I saw the retrofitted 3D version at a public screening in London and had the entire cinema to myself, so Sony's efforts to redress the imbalance evidently still have a way to go. But the absence of promotion in the UK doubtless reflects a certain lack of faith in the product.

League of Gods (titled *Fengshen* on the print, *Fengshen Bang* in the Chinese pre-publicity) is based on the first half of the fantasy-*wuxia* novel *Fengshen Yanyi* by Xu Zhonglin, a piece of generic pulp fiction which incorporates characters from Chinese mythology – such as Nezha, the out-of-control child-god who flies on two flaming wheels – but has none of the literary or philosophical ambitions of *wuxia* novels by Jin Yong or Gu Long. The plot fits the standard-issue valiant-rebels-versus-tyrannical-ruler template, cluttered with enough subplots and digressions to deflect any suggestion of contemporary political allegory. Supernatural forces are rife and almost everyone in sight is endowed with 'magic' powers, so it's a surprise that they bothered with actors and live-action photography at all. The density of CGI work is such that (going by the lengthy end-credits) the animation industries of South Korea and several other countries were kept very busy to meet the release deadline.

The murky 3D version is unwatchably wretched, but it's hard to imagine that the 2D version works any better. Ringmaster Koan Hui learned his craft at the feet of Tsui Hark (they've worked together on and off since 1996), but apparently learned little from *Zu* (1983) or Tsui's



Through the murk: Jet Li, Tony Leung Ka-Fai

other 'mythic' special-visual-effects extravaganzas. Tsui's trademark zappy editing style, always coherent in its storytelling, is here reduced to an undifferentiated blur, as if each brief shot had been planned in isolation because the animators needed it that way. Narrative and characterisation cues are all in shorthand (and hence largely incomprehensible to non-Chinese viewers) and the occasional spasm of feeble cartoon humour fails to leaven the unrelentingly bombastic tone. The generic motifs of 'heroic' quests and 'epic' battles have no dramatic traction; there's no suspense, no credible emotion, no sense of risk or awe. Chen Kaige's seriously botched attempt at fashioning a Chinese *Lord of the Rings* in *Wuji/The Promise* (2005) seems skilful in comparison.

Many of the actors and key crew-members come from the tattered remains of the Hong Kong film industry, bringing tech know-how but none of their former flair. The only performance which survives the CGI overlays is mainland star Fan Bingbing's turn as the mildly lascivious baddie. It would be nice to claim William Chang's production designs as a redeeming feature, given his major contributions to Wong Kar Wai's films amongst many others, but no shot is held long enough on screen to be sure. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Charles Heung Tiffany Chen	Cast Jet Li Jiang Ziya Tony Leung Ka-Fai King Zhou Louis Koo Shen Gongbao Huang Xiaoming Erlang Shen Fan Bingbing Daji Wen Zhang Nezha Angelababy the mermaid Jacky Heung Leizhenzi	Sony Pictures Releasing UK
Written by Cheryyoko Samson Sun Based on <i>Fengshen Yanyi</i> by Xu Zhonglin	Editor Wayne Philip Wahrman	Chinese theatrical title Fengshen Bang
Production Designer William Chang	Music John Debnay	
Sound Designer Brent Burge	Production Companies Star Entertainment Group, Huayi Brothers Media Group	
	In Colour [2.35:1] Subtitles	
	Some screenings presented in 3D	
	Distributor	

China, the mythic past. King Zhou of Shang leads a hedonistic life in his palace, much enhanced by his consort Daji, a cruel sorceress. Zhou's alter ego is a huge black dragon. Jiang Ziya of Xiqi guides a small militia of adepts to attack Zhou's palace and liberate the Invisible Tribe, a group of mystics imprisoned in his dungeons. Jiang and his allies escape to Xiqi on the back of a giant crane to plot another assault on the tyrant. Daji curses Jiang to live his life in reverse and summons the Sword of Light to protect the palace. Growing younger by the day, Jiang selects Peiqi (a tyro adept who has not yet sprouted the wings that will enable him to fly) to travel to the palace to win the Sword of Light. Peiqi's overland journey is fraught with perils and sidetracks and he is alternately helped and hindered by the unruly baby-god Nezha, who occasionally takes an adult form. Daji's lieutenant Gongbao uses a young woman to channel advance warning of Peiqi's plans, but Peiqi (now winged) eventually reaches the palace and destroys the Sword of Light. The Xiqi rebels look forward to their final victory over 'Black Dragon' Zhou.

Life on the Road

United Kingdom 2016
Director: Ricky Gervais
Certificate 15 95m 53s

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

Does it offend you, yeah? It's possible to use stereotypes and be funny, and it's possible for a comic character to be insufferable and yet watchable; but Ricky Gervais, whose work is fixated on the giving and taking of offence, has lost his form (and his co-writer) since *The Office* was on television, and the result is a feature-length spin-off that leans on barely ironised stereotypes and labours to pull a last-minute redemption out of thin air for its irredeemably irritating protagonist. It doesn't – speaking as an able-bodied middle-class straight white cis man – particularly offend, no, but nor does it entertain.

There's no denying how thoroughly realised a character David Brent (Gervais) is, and how deep is Gervais's dedication to making him borderline repulsive – to the point of suffixing almost every sentence with an annoying whinny. At the very start of the film, after a spot of sexual harassment and some wordplay too crude and unfunny to go into, Brent and his co-worker Nigel (Tom Bennett), the Gareth figure at Brent's new office Lavichem, do 'Chinaman' accents, and Brent rolls out a catchphrase for a camp persona he is working on for a stand-up act. Does it offend you, yeah?

Brent is hauled in by HR, but while we aren't supposed to believe Brent's justifications, neither can we warm to the humourless scold – onscreen avatar for the critics whose opinions Gervais has always seemed too concerned about – who has told him off. And so the scene is set, and the question raised: how exactly will Gervais contrive to make us see the inevitable humanity beneath the grotesque surface?

Life on the Road retains the docudrama format from the TV series: 15-odd years later, David Brent has reformed his band Foregone Conclusion, and the cameras return to Slough to follow him on tour. Brent manages a rapper, Dom (Doc Brown), and gets on with him tolerably well, but the other musicians are hired hands who despise him. The gigs, all of which are within a short drive from home but for which Brent has hired a tour bus and hotel rooms, are poorly attended, and Brent's hopes of attracting a record label are predictably dashed. Most of his songs are well-meaning denunciations of prejudice ('Please Don't Make Fun of the Disabled'), which are (of course) cringe-inducing and unwittingly full of prejudice. Brent frequently exploits his quasi-friendship with Dom to prove his lack of racism, asking him for example to endorse his high opinion of Luther Vandross, then saying, "See, from the horse's mouth," when Dom concurs.

It rapidly transpires that Brent lacks a foil. Dom's role mostly involves being ineffectually exasperated, and the musicians are interchangeable. Occasionally they have their say in the interview sections, which the film has also retained from the series, but this only serves to demonstrate Gervais's failure to dramatise. Thus *Life on the Road* is a long-seeming series of awkward situations without much development – though some of these are funny. When the band are booked to play a student union, it turns out to be an ironic 'shite night', and Brent, resentful, goes on stage and makes stupendously dated jokes about students only getting up in time to watch *Countdown*.



No country for old material: Ricky Gervais

As director, Gervais is commendably committed to showing the Thames Valley at its most mundane, but the docudrama conceit is constantly being betrayed, many if not most scenes being shot from multiple angles that in reality would reveal the other cameras.

There is pathos in Brent's loneliness, but Gervais handles it clumsily. As Brent leaves the office to go on tour, Gervais puts the maudlin 'Handbags and Gladbags' on the soundtrack and holds the shot on Brent's exit, a jarring attempt to evoke sympathy by wholly external means. The ending is similarly jerry-built. Before the last gig, Brent's soundman (Tom Basden) – who has spent the film spurning

him while taking his money – delivers a homily to the effect that he shouldn't need to be on stage for people to like him. Brent says people don't like him off stage either, which is uncharacteristically self-aware and true; but the soundman says he does, and it is somehow meant to be sincere.

Worse, when Brent returns to the office, Pauline (Jo Hartley), the unfortunate co-worker whose presence he has barely registered, finally manages to break through and persuade him, not without prompting, to get her a coffee. There is something pretentious about this redemption – the 'little victories that keep us going' sort of thing – and also entirely unearned. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Charlie Hanson
Producer for
LOTR Films
Ricky Gervais
Written by
Ricky Gervais
Based on an original
series produced
by BBC Comedy
Productions
Director of
Photography
Remi Adefarasin
Edited by
Gary Dollner
Production Designer
Anna Higginson
Production
Sound Mixer
Alastair Widgery
Costume Designer
Amanda Monk

©LOTR Films Ltd,
British Broadcasting
Corporation,
Entertainment
One UK Limited
Production
Companies

Entertainment
One and BBC Films
present a LOTR
Films production
A Ricky Gervais film
Produced by
LOTR Films Ltd
Executive Producers
Alex Hamilton
Christine Langan
Duncan Hayes

Cast
Ricky Gervais
David Brent
Ben Bailey Smith
[i.e. Doc Brown]
Dom Johnson
Tom Basden
Dan Harvey
Jo Hartley
Pauline Gray
Tom Bennett
Nigel Martin
Andrew Brooke
Jerry Collins, 'Jezza'
Mandeep Dhillon
Karen Parashar
Miles Chapman
Andy Chapman

Abbie Murphy
Serena Wilson
Rebecca Gethings
Miriam Clark
Nina Sosanya
Dr Vivienne Keating
Diane Morgan
Briony Jones
Kevin Bishop
DJ

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
E1 Films

Publicity title
David Brent: Life
on the Road

Slough, present day. Fifteen or so years after his moment of fame as the star of the BBC2 reality series 'The Office', David Brent is again followed by a documentary crew as he goes on tour as lead singer of his band Foregone Conclusion. Brent, now a sales rep for Lavichem, has financed the tour himself, rather lavishly, paying for a tour bus and hotels even though the bottom-of-the-bill gigs he has booked are close to home. The original members of Foregone Conclusion having moved on, Brent recruits a band of younger musicians, including Dom, a black rapper whom he also manages – and continually uses to emphasise his lack of racial prejudice.

The gigs are poorly attended, and with the partial exception of Dom, the band members exploit Brent's desperate generosity while excluding him from the bus and from post-gig drinks. Brent eventually persuades an A&R man to attend one of the shows. The latter is appalled by Brent, but he sees potential in Dom as a solo act. Brent's failure to generate any interest in his own music, together with the contempt of his hired band and his lack of success with women, leads him to despondency. At the last gig, however, his sound engineer shows him a kindness, and back at the office his co-worker Pauline, who went to one of the gigs, shows an interest in him, which he reciprocates.

Little Men

USA/Brazil/Greece 2016
Director: Ira Sachs

See Feature
on page 32

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

In Ira Sachs's previous film, *Love Is Strange* (2014), two gay men in a long-term relationship are forced apart not through any slackening of love between them but simply on financial grounds: with New York City rents skyrocketing, they can no longer afford their shared apartment. It's a theme taken up again in Sachs's latest film, though from the opposite angle: when actor Brian Jardine and his family move into the Brooklyn apartment he's inherited from his father, he finds himself under pressure to quadruple the rent paid by dressmaker Leonor, whose shop occupies the ground floor. The relationship threatened with fracture, though, isn't between Brian and Leonor, who barely know each other, but between their teenage sons, Jake and Tony, who strike up an instant friendship with no more than the mildest hint of homoeroticism; they just enjoy each other's company, partly it seems for the contrast in their temperaments: Jake is the quiet sensitive one, while Tony is outgoing and ebullient. Sachs has described them, respectively, as Bresson and Scorsese characters.

Sachs and Mauricio Zacharias, co-writing as they did on *Love Is Strange* and its predecessor, *Keep the Lights On* (2012), have created an appealingly low-key drama with no recourse to grandstanding scenes. The nod to Chekhov (Brian is playing Trigorin in a local theatre production of *The Seagull*) makes perfect sense: nuance and understatement rule, and what's not said most of the time is as significant as what is. Sachs often lets his camera do the talking: Tony's attraction to Eva, a pretty classmate, emerges not through anything he says when they're in a group together, but in the way the camera singles her out and lingers on her face, acting as his surrogate. The delight Tony and Jake find in each other's company is expressed in a series of exhilarated lateral tracking shots, skimming alongside them as they scooter and roller-skate along the Brooklyn sidewalks. Though by way of contrast there's one gloriously hyper-vocal scene when Tony, who's taking acting classes, gets into a synthetic shouting match with his drama teacher (Mauricio Bustamante); given the latter's shaven head and in-yer-face stance, this looks singularly like a knowing spoof of *Whiplash* (2014).

As in *Love Is Strange*, Sachs creates a potent sense of place. Largely shot in and around the Brooklyn neighbourhoods it portrays, *Little Men* captures the feel of a district that still retains something of its lively class and ethnic mix but is inexorably gentrifying, smoothing out the rougher and more idiosyncratic edges. And of course it's that same process of gentrification that fuels the plot, with Brian reluctantly putting the screws on Leonor. It would be easy to present the dressmaker, a Chilean immigrant single mother, as the hapless victim of a greedy Wasp couple, callously forced out of her humble livelihood, but Sachs and Zacharias have nothing so crude in mind. This is a world where, in the best Renoir-esque tradition, *tout le monde a ses raisons*; characters are rounded, and nobody is patronised or demonised. Brian (Greg Kinnear) and his wife Kathy (Jennifer Ehle), though essentially well-meaning, aren't always the most tactful in their



Rent apart: Theo Taplitz

dealings with Leonor (Paulina Garcia); and she in her turn isn't above using moral blackmail, telling Brian that she was "more family" to his father Max than he ever was, that Max had never dreamed of raising her rent, and hinting that they were lovers. The nearest approximation to a villain, possibly, is Brian's sister Audrey (Talia Balsam), who pressurises her brother to insist on the rent increase while staying at a prudent distance from the haggling, but even she is shown as acting from necessity rather than avarice.

Excellent though the adult principals are, acting honours go to Theo Taplitz and Michael Barbieri as Jake and Tony, both making their feature-film debut. There's a refreshing directness and honesty

to their performances that make their characters wholly believable as just-teenagers negotiating what Taplitz himself calls "that in-between age when you're still trying to figure out who you are"; and their scenes together, with their jokes, mood-swings and intrigued mutual exploration of their contrasted backgrounds and temperaments, ring wholly true. Sachs has cited as his inspiration Ozu's films *I Was Born, But...* (1932) and its remake *Good Morning* (1959), in which two small boys, like Jake and Tony, decide to boycott their parents. If *Little Men* doesn't quite achieve that exalted level – the ending falls a little flat – it's still a work of subtle charm and exceptional psychological impact, well up to its makers' previous work. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Lucas Joaquin
Ira Sachs
Christos V.
Konstantakopoulos
Jim Landé
L.A. Teodosio
Written by
Mauricio Zacharias
Ira Sachs
Director of
Photography
Óscar Durán
Editors
Mollie Goldstein
Affonso Gonçalves
Production Designer

Alexandra Schaller
Original Music
Dickon Hinchcliffe
Sound Design
Damian Volpe
Costume Designer
Eden Miller

©TYFBH, LLC
Production
Companies
Race Point Films,
Farlito House and
Charlie Guidance
Productions present a
Buffalo 8 production
in association with

Parts & Labor,
Raptor Films, Water's
End Productions
and RT Features
A film by Ira Sachs
Executive Producers
Tom Dolby
Dom Genest
Matthew Helderman
Daniella Kahane
Lars Knudsen
David Kyle
Sophie Mas
Melissa Pinsky
Blythe Robertson
Lourenço Sant'Anna
Hugh Schulze

Luke Taylor
Rodrigo Teixeira
Jay Van Hoy
Franklin Zitter

Cast

Greg Kinnear
Brian Jardine
Jennifer Ehle
Kathy Jardine
Paulina García
Leonor Calvelli
Theo Taplitz
Jake Jardine
Michael Barbieri
Tony Calvelli

Talia Balsam
Audrey
Maliq Johnson
Umar
Anthony Angelo
Flaminio
Joey
Madison Wright
Julia
Mauricio
Bustamante
acting teacher
John Proccacino
Mr Plummer
Alfred Molina
Hernán
Ching Valdes-Aran

Pilar
Stan Carp
Sal Bartolini
Stella Schnabel
Nina
Yolanda Ross
Arkadina
Teeka Duplessis
Eva

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Altitude Film
Distribution

Present-day Brooklyn. Struggling actor Brian Jardine moves with his psychotherapist wife Kathy and 13-year-old son Jake into the apartment left to him by his late father Max. The ground floor is occupied by a dress shop run by Leonor Calvelli, who has a son, Tony, of Jake's age. The shy Jake, who wants to be an artist, and extrovert Tony, who hopes to become an actor, strike up a friendship. Since Brian earns little, Kathy brings in the main family income. Brian's sister Audrey puts pressure on him to raise Leonor's rent, which hasn't increased in eight years. Leonor resists, saying that

she can't possibly afford it, and refuses to sign the new lease, causing a rift. The respective parents try to discourage the boys from seeing each other. In response, Jake and Tony stop talking to their parents. Urged on by Audrey, Brian serves Leonor with an eviction notice. When he learns about this, Jake breaks his silence and tearfully begs his father not to go through with it, but the eviction goes ahead. Jake goes to the LaGuardia School to study art. One day, while sketching with his class in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, he sees Tony in the distance with a group of friends, but doesn't contact him.

The Lovers & the Despot

United Kingdom/The Netherlands/France/USA/Republic of Korea/Germany/Sweden 2016
Directors: Robert Cannan, Ross Adam
Certificate PG 98m 4s

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

"When put in extreme situations, people imitate what they see in movies," reports South Korean film director Shin Sang-ok of his time spent in a North Korean detention centre. "If I was going to make a movie about this situation, how would I film it?" The consequence was an elaborate, Hollywood-influenced escape plan that failed dismally.

The sense of a man whose ideas tended to have more style than substance haunts this strange tale of propaganda and political kidnapping. Shin's once stellar career as a director had hit the skids due to his poor business sense. His photogenic marriage to his favourite leading lady, Choi Eun-hee, had fallen apart thanks to his repeated infidelities. And once he and Choi were both – according to their own account – taken prisoner by the North Korean regime and forced to make films to help satisfy the cinephilia and rampaging ego of Kim Jong-il, the work he churned out didn't quite fulfil the dictator's dreams of turning his nation into a significant producer of films.

This account of the imprisonment of Shin and Choi thankfully evades the mood of kitsch condescension found in so many portrayals of North Korean life, though it acknowledges the extreme otherness that informs it: the flamboyance of the state propaganda, the violent intensity of the cult of personality around the Kim dynasty. Instead, it relies on interviews, archive photographs, re-enactments and film clips to reproduce an account of the events that ambiguously blends Shin and Choi's version – they were helpless puppets of Kim Jong-il and longed to escape – and the more sceptical interpretation of other observers.

"This story could seem funny if we were a suspicious kind of people," says Dean S. Robinson, who worked at the US embassy in



Their biggest fan: Choi Eun-hee, Shin Sang-ok

Vienna, where the couple eventually presented themselves in search of help to return to South Korea. Viewers of this film may be minded to agree. As with Shin's escape plan, dramatic elements fail to coalesce into a working narrative here. Choi is never pinned down about the possibility that she and Shin all cooked this up for financial reasons, or that he hoodwinked her. Detail on Shin's films from both South and North Korea is conspicuous by its absence.

What does emerge strongly is the sense of a trio of people whose investment in cinema overlaid their real lives with a peculiar phoniness. "If this was a film, there would be a lot of tears," Choi says of her reunion with her estranged ex (what happened to his other woman and their child, we are not told). "It was like slow motion in movies," is her memory of their flight through Vienna to the US embassy. And the films she made herself? "I liked the ones that won me awards," she says, "more than the ones I really thought were good." 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Robert Cannan
Ross Adam
Natasha Dack Ojumu
Written by
Robert Cannan
Ross Adam
Jim Hession
Cinematographers
Interviews:
Yoonseuk Back
Park Byung Kyu
Ric Clark
Will Edwards
Jon Sayers
Robin Probyn
Wilson M Waggoner
John Halliday
Richard Numeroff
Drama:
Mary Farbrother
Dan Stafford-Clark
Ross Adam
Bayan Joonam
Edited by
Jim Hession
Original Music
Nathan Halpern
Sound Designer
Al Sirckett

and BBC present in association with The Documentary Company and Influence Film ZDF/Arte, SVT and Sundance Documentary Film Program in co-production with NTR, Pumpnickel Films and Submarine a Hellflower and Tigerlily production Supported by grants from the Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program With support from Open Society Foundations and Ford Foundations Just Films, the Seoul Metropolitan Government and Seoul Film Commission and the Tribeca Documentary Fund With the support of the Media programme of the European Union With the participation of KOFIC Location Incentive

Developed with support from Creative England and Britdoc Made with the support of the BFI's Film Fund
Executive Producers
Sandra Whiphram
Victoria Steventon
Cristina Ljungberg
Nick Fraser
Kate Townsend
Richard Holmes
Sheryl Crown
Maggie Monteith
Film Extracts
Musukja/Homeless Wanderer (1968)
Sorok pervyy/The Forty-first (1956)
Tolchulhi/Runaway (1984)
Sogum/Salt (1985)
Sara-innun ryonghongdul/Souls Protest (2000)
3 Ninjas Knuckle Up (1995)

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Soda Pictures

A documentary relating the story of the abduction of South Korean actress Choi Eun-hee and her husband, film director Shin Sang-ok, and their forced relocation to North Korea as part of an effort by the then dictator Kim Jong-il to improve the cinematic output of his country.

The couple meet in 1953, marry at the height of their shared fame and success and adopt a son and daughter. By the 1970s, however, their film company is in financial trouble, and the couple have separated, Shin having fathered a child with another woman. In 1978 Choi is invited to a meeting in Hong Kong, ostensibly about a film project. Instead she is bundled on to a boat, drugged and taken to North Korea. Kim Jong-il meets her at the harbour. Choi dreams of escape but plays the part of Kim's loyal friend. Back in South Korea, Shin searches for her; but when he retraces her steps to Hong Kong, he too is kidnapped and taken to North Korea. Shin is imprisoned for five years, during which time he is subjected to efforts to brainwash him. The former couple are reunited at Kim Jong-il's birthday party. They produce many films for Kim and appear from the outside to be loyal to the North Korean regime.

Encouraged by Kim to visit neutral countries to promote North Korea's film business, they present themselves at the US embassy in Austria and are helped to return to South Korea and their families. Subsequently they move to Los Angeles, where Shin produces Disney's '3 Ninjas' franchise. They remain together until Shin's death in 2006.

Nine Lives

France/People's Republic of China 2016
Director: Barry Sonnenfeld
Certificate PG 86m 37s

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

Though there hasn't been a better year to offer a film in which a boorish New York billionaire who loves putting his name on things is degraded and punished, there's something truly timeless about the lazy execution and lowest-common-denominator humour of *Nine Lives*. Following the basic arc of the body-swap genre – the *Freaky Friday* kind, not the *Lost Highway* or *Duelle* variety – businessman Tom Brand (Kevin Spacey, doing a copy of a copy of his *Swimming with Sharks* shtick) is trapped inside the body of his daughter's cat until he learns what a jerk he's been. If he doesn't, he'll be stuck as a cat for ever. (The cat's name, Mr Fuzzypants, offers a painfully accurate sense of the film's comedic sensibility.)

Somehow, everything outside of this mystical curse manages to be completely unbelievable and convoluted. Scene after scene, Tom fixates on his latest project, the Firebrand building, which was meant to be the tallest skyscraper in North America but is about to be beaten by 60ft by a building in Chicago. Unsurprisingly, the extensive discussions and conflicts around this contest are as boring as they are phallic. As Tom's body lies in a coma (while he is stuck in the cat), his board plots to sell his company out from under him, having long, incomprehensible discussions about how to double-cross him. Why would children, for whom this film is presumably intended, find such Fortune 500 back-dealings compelling? Why would Tom's daughter google websites about cat reincarnation while her dad is in a coma, instead of looking at WebMD? Why does Tom's trophy wife Lara (a wasted Jennifer Garner) do her own cooking and seemingly have no staff? Why is she besties with Tom's booze-hound ex-wife (a literally wasted Cheryl Hines)?

In the film's darkest and most absurd moment – which somehow ends up being its climax – David (Robbie Amell), Tom's long-suffering son from his first marriage, jumps off the Firebrand building seemingly to commit suicide. But it turns out that he planned to base-jump off it all along – even though he did plenty of unambiguous muttering about self-



All's fur in love and war: Christopher Walken

extinction before gloomily heading to the building's roof. Huh? Why?

The answer, as is true of nearly every stunt executed by humans or CG cats in this film, seems to be because it looks neat – or is supposed to. Inserting the big-eyed, pink-nosed Mr Fuzzypants into all sorts of crazy situations, *Nine Lives* simultaneously demonstrates how you really *can* do anything with computers nowadays and why you really shouldn't. Rather than scenes building on one another, things just happen in succession – Mr Fuzzypants pees in his ex-wife's handbag, Mr Fuzzypants opens a decanter of whisky and then stumbles around his penthouse drunk. In short, *Nine Lives* delivers a handful of wannabe viral cat videos rather than bothering to be a movie. What is intended to be the story's glue – a clichéd sense of how relationships work, Christopher Walken as a puffy-haired weirdo, whatever the board is doing – never coheres, leaving us instead with familiar but isolated components. Even the most fervent cat haters will long for the company of a real one after staring at this puss for 90 minutes. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Lisa Elzey	A film by Barry Sonnenfeld	Dolby Digital In Colour [1.85:1]
Written by Gwyn Lurie Matt R. Allen Caleb Wilson Daniel Antoniazzi Ben Shiffrin	Made possible with the support of the membership of AQTIS Union	Distributor Lionsgate UK
Director of Photography Karl Walter Lindenlaub	A Europacorp production	French theatrical title Ma vie de chat
Editors Don Zimmerman David Zimmerman	In association with Fundamental Films	
Production Designer Michael Wylie	Executive Producers Jonathan Vanger Claude Leger Mark Gad Gregory Ouahnon	
Music Evgueni Galperine Sacha Galperine	Cast Kevin Spacey Tom Brand Jennifer Garner Lara Brand Christopher Walken Felix Perkins Malina Weissman Rebecca Brand Cheryl Hines Madison Camden Mark Consuelos Ian Cox Robbie Amell David Brand	
Sound Engineer Louis Marion		
Costume Designer Marilyn Fitoussi		
©EuropaCorp Production Companies EuropaCorp presents a EuropaCorp production in association with Fundamental Films		

New York City, the present. Selfish billionaire Tom Brand is late to his daughter's birthday party, and rushes to Purkins Pet Store to buy her a cat. Instead of going straight to the party, however, he stops to meet his employee Ian at the site of his new skyscraper, set to be the tallest in North America. After Tom yells at Ian, the building's spire is struck by lightning and Tom is thrown from the top. His mind goes into the cat and his body goes into a coma. Tom initially misbehaves as the cat, but eventually learns to be sweet and supportive to his wife and daughter. Meanwhile, Ian and the board plot to sell the company. When Tom is about to be taken off life-support, his son David jumps from the skyscraper's roof at its opening ceremony, seemingly to commit suicide. The cat jumps with him, but it turns out that David has a parachute and merely wants to interrupt Ian's announcement of the company's IPO. Tom wakes up human again. Ian is hit by a car and turns into a cat.

The 9th Life of Louis Drax

Canada/United Kingdom/USA 2015

Director: Alexandre Aja

Certificate 15 108m 0s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

So far, the output of French-born director Alexandre Aja has circled around the horror genre but has yet to score a bullseye. His second feature, the slasher movie *Haute tension* (2003), showed promise but suffered from over-contrived plotting, as did *Mirrors* (2008). Two remakes, *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006) and *Piranha 3D* (2010), fell some way short of the originals. *Horns* (2013), in which Daniel Radcliffe, suspected of killing his girlfriend, starts to sprout the titular protuberances, floundered on its central concept – original, certainly, but risible. Aja's latest, *The 9th Life of Louis Drax*, is his most accomplished to date, though flawed by one serious miscalculation.

The film's prime strength lies in its central character – even though for most of its running time he's in a coma. Right from the start, nine-year-old Louis Drax (Aiden Longworth) introduces himself in voiceover as "the amazing accident-prone boy", while we see a quick, near-comic run-through of the disasters that have put paid to his first eight lives – electrocution, food poisoning, a falling chandelier, etc. (We get a reprise of some of these, from a crucially different perspective, towards the end of the film.) Then comes the fatal ninth-birthday picnic with his estranged parents at Lands End (the San Francisco park, not Cornwall), after which he dies for two hours, then revives into a coma. But his voiceover continues, not only telling us about his past but commenting on events occurring while he's unconscious – and even, it seems, sometimes controlling them.

For all that Louis is appealingly sweet-faced and a victim, the film never falls into the trap of making him cute and loveable. On the contrary, his attitude is cool, caustic and even at times cruel. "He's a liar, as all men are," he remarks about his shrink Dr Perez (Oliver Platt), mocking



Mind out: Sarah Gadon, Jamie Dornan

him for being fat, and when his neurologist Dr Allan Pascal (Jamie Dornan) falls for his mother (Sarah Gadon), he observes cynically, "He thought that because Mommy is so beautiful she must be good." His closest relationship seems to be with his father Peter (Aaron Paul), for all that the man is presented as violent and abusive. This closeness, though, leads to the film's chief misstep, when in Louis's imaginings Peter appears to him as a ludicrous, gravel-voiced, lumbering, tarry monster, a cross between a Tolkien orc and the Creature from the Black Lagoon.

This apart, though, Aja and his screenwriter Max Minghella (whose late father Anthony originally optioned Liz Jensen's source novel) play ingenious games with different levels of reality. When we first meet Dr Pascal, who's evidently something of a media star, he's signing copies of his book after giving a Ted talk, and the briefly glimpsed title is *Coma – The Mind Within*. It's a clear pointer to the film's key gambit as it teases us to wonder how much – perhaps even all – of what we see is happening inside Louis's comatose mind. The final reveal, though hinted at, provides a satisfying twist. On this showing, Aja's next film might just hit that elusive bullseye. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Shawn Williamson Alexandre Aja Timothy Bricknell Max Minghella	Produced with the participation of Telefilm Canada	[2.35:1]
Screenplay Max Minghella Based upon the novel by Liz Jensen	Produced in association with Movie Central, The Movie Network	Distributor Soda Pictures
Director of Photography Maxime Alexandre	Executive Producers Zanne Devine Rosanne Korenberg	
Edited by Baxter	Film Extracts <i>High and Dizzy</i> (1920)	
Production Design Rachel O'Toole	Cast Jamie Dornan Dr Allan Pascal Sarah Gadon Natalie Drax Aiden Longworth Louis Drax Oliver Platt Dr Michael Perez Molly Parker Detective Dalton Barbara Hershey Violet Drax Aaron Paul Peter Drax Julian Wadham Dr Janek Jane McGregor Sophie	
Music Patrick Watson	Dolby Digital In Colour	
Sound Mixer Darren Brisker		
Costume Designer Carla Hetland		
©Drax (Canada) Productions Inc., Drax Films UK Limited		
Production Companies Miramax presents a Blank Tape, Brightlight Pictures production in association with Fire Axe Pictures		
A film by Alexandre Aja		

Present-day San Francisco. On his ninth birthday, accident-prone Louis Drax is taken for a cliff-top picnic by his parents, Peter and Natalie (who are living apart). When they argue, Louis runs away and falls off the cliff. He's retrieved from the sea, seemingly dead. He revives in hospital, though without regaining consciousness, and is placed under the care of Dr Allan Pascal, a coma specialist. Meanwhile Peter has disappeared; the police are looking for him, believing that he may have pushed Louis over the cliff.

Natalie and the unhappily married Allan are mutually attracted. While Louis lies in a coma, we hear his voiceover commenting on what's happening and recounting past events. He recalls his course of analysis with Dr Michael Perez, which Natalie terminated, precipitating a row with Peter. Natalie is given a room in the hospital; she and Allan become lovers. Letters are found, seemingly from Louis warning his mother against Allan. Louis sees himself being led into a cave by a blackened sea monster that he identifies with Peter. Peter's mother Violet arrives and gets into a fight with Natalie. Peter's body is found in the sea near where Louis fell. Sleepwalking, Allan writes with Louis's handwriting; later, hypnotised by Dr Perez, he speaks as Louis, recounting how Natalie pushed Peter over the cliff, and also how she has engineered most of Louis's accidents since he was little. Natalie, diagnosed with Munchausen syndrome by proxy, is confined in an asylum, pregnant with Allan's baby. Violet reads to Louis; his eyes open.

"A WILDLY IMAGINATIVE AND RICHLY
BAROQUE FAIRY-TALE FANTASY"

Philip Kemp, Total Film



Time Out



The Telegraph

"VISUALLY WONDERFUL... FABULOUS IN EVERY SENSE"

Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian



Total Film



Evening Standard



The Times



CineVue

"GORGEOUSLY SHOT,
GLORIOUSLY MAD AND
WILDLY HORRIFYING"

Colin Crummy, i-D

"BIZARRE, BONKERS AND
UNLIKE ANYTHING ELSE
YOU'LL SEE THIS YEAR"

James Mottram, Marie Claire

SALMA
HAYEK

VINCENT
CASSEL

TOBY
JONES

AND
JOHN C.
REILLY

TALE OF TALES

A FILM BY MATTEO GARRONE

CURZON
ARTIFICIAL EYE



OUT NOW ON
DVD & BLU-RAY™

AVAILABLE AT amazon.co.uk

Free Super Saver and Unlimited One-Day Delivery with Amazon Prime are available on eligible orders. Terms and conditions apply. See Amazon.co.uk for details. Amazon, the Amazon logo and Amazon.co.uk are registered trademarks of Amazon EU SARI or its affiliates.

Sausage Party

USA 2016

Directors: Conrad Vernon, Greg Tiernan

Certificate 15 88m 36s

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

Although studios often try and miserably fail at true edginess – look no further than the dry fart that was *Suicide Squad* – it's always refreshing to see something as dumb and filthy as *Sausage Party* deliver on its promise. Holding the distinction of being the first R-rated CG film, this druggier version of *Veggie Tales* is unfailing in its commitment to shock and comment on faith.

In Shopwell's supermarket, the belief system of the various foods is simple: shoppers are 'gods' who take them to the 'great beyond', where they are loved and never squeezed or hurt; also, for some reason, there's a proviso against pre-purchase sexual relations, and different aisles hate each other for believing the 'wrong' thing. (They seemingly lack cosmology, which is probably why foods that are made out of other animals/products, such as hot dogs, don't realise it.) Despite the German mustard's desire to exterminate juice, there's a relative calm in the supermarket – until a bottle of honey mustard is returned, traumatised, and signals that not all is well outside the store. Frank (Seth Rogen), a hot dog who has fallen out of his package, decides to investigate and soon discovers the horrible truth: the gods eat food to make themselves stronger, and their religion is based on non-perishable items (a bottle of booze, a box of grits and a Twinkie).

Frank at first takes the tack of a new atheist, rudely addressing everyone in the store as idiots because he's found 'the truth', and holding up a piece of a cookbook as proof. (Even the Hitler mustard calls him intolerant.) Later, with the assistance of Barry, one of his former package-mates (Michael Cera, in his most bearable performance in years), Frank is able to unite everyone against the gods and kill them. In the film's subtlest moment of irony, the key to his success in mass-murdering humans is approaching the situation with more humility and pragmatism.

But this is broad, naughty comedy in a Zucker, Abrahams and Zucker vein, which is perfectly



Reservoir hot dogs: *Sausage Party*

suited to the gaudy aesthetics of food packaging and the more often than not self-exploitative nature of 'ethnic' food marketing: the Indian food aisle looks like a bustling street market; the arguments between bagels and Levantine flatbreads replicate those around Israel and Palestine; the Jamaican rum has dreadlocks. All the same, the film's humour never falls into the gratuitous, excessive, or cringe-worthy: an equal-opportunity offender, every punch pulled is met with another equally rude joke. And in the end, having cast off the shackles of false belief, the foods celebrate with a good long orgy with pairings that were formerly *verboten*, be it because of taste concerns or religious division. (A lesbian taco voiced by Salma Hayek finally gets to grab Frank's bun girlfriend's buns after lusting after her for the entire film; Frank watches approvingly.)

None of this bawdy, non-PC humour would be possible without *Sausage Party*'s truly fantastic animation, which offers zany, up-the-butt angles of pear-shaped shoppers and harrowing scenes of violence against food. Infuriatingly, because of behind-the-scenes dramas involving overtime, many of the animators who worked on the film do not appear in the film's credits (but do appear on IMDb). Hopefully this will be rectified for the UK release. **S**

Sour Grapes

France/United Kingdom/The Netherlands/USA/

Denmark/Sweden/Israel/Finland 2016

Directors: Jerry Rothwell, Reuben Atlas, Certificate 15 85m 2s

Reviewed by Jason Anderson

"Wine became my life and I lost myself in it." Rudy Kurniawan wrote these words in his apology to the judge who was about to sentence him for orchestrating one of the most infamous frauds the wine world had ever seen. Yet the statement applies equally well to many of the colourful figures we meet in Jerry Rothwell and Reuben Atlas's smartly crafted history of Kurniawan's case, a true-crime story that's sufficiently juicy to appeal to the usually divergent tastes of mystery-lovers and well-heeled oenophiles.

This gallery ranges from 'Hollywood Jef' Levy, a director and producer who earned his own infamy as a member of a group of high-rolling, high-spending vino devotees known as the Angry Men, who'd consume hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of rare wine in a single evening, to Brad Goldstein, a quick-witted PI with a cute dog that's hell-bent on stealing his owner's camera time. Filled with impressionist art, antiquities and a wine cellar that would've been the envy of Nero, the impossibly lavish Palm Beach spread of billionaire Bill Koch deserves a documentary unto itself.

A rather more genteel player in the plot, Laurent Ponsot is the Burgundy vintner who becomes Kurniawan's prime nemesis after the young forger is connected to counterfeit bottles of Domaine Ponsot. The filmmakers present Ponsot as the intrepid defender of all that is honourable in the wine business, even if much of *Sour Grapes* lambasts the industry for having a surplus of the sort of willing dupes and self-interested enablers that no swindler can do without.

Given that *Sour Grapes* succeeds so well as a gripping tale of chicanery populated by flashy one-percenters, it's no surprise that the film bears less resemblance to recent wine documentaries such as *Red Obsession* (2013) than to business-world exposés like *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* (2005). The New York-based Atlas and his British collaborator Rothwell – whose respective credits include the jazz film *Brothers Hypnotic* (2013) and the Greenpeace history *How to Change the World* (2015) – originally met when they both came to cover Kurniawan's trial for separate projects. Their effort benefits from brisk pacing, a clear presentation of details



The turn of the corkscrew: *Sour Grapes*

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Megan Ellison
Seth Rogen
Evan Goldberg
Conrad Vernon

Screenplay

Kyle Hunter
Ariel Shaffir
Seth Rogen
Evan Goldberg

Story

Seth Rogen
Evan Goldberg
Jonah Hill
Editor

Kevin Pavlovic

Production Designer

Kyle McQueen

Music

Alan Menken
Christopher YOUNG

Sound Design

Geoffrey G. Rubay

Animation

Supervisors

Steve Wittmann

Jeff Bailey

©Columbia Pictures

Industries, Inc. and

Great Beyond, LLC

Production Companies

Columbia Pictures
and Annapurna
Pictures present a
Point Grey production

Executive Producers

Jonah Hill

James Weaver

Ariel Shaffir

Kyle Hunter

David Distenfeld

Voice Cast

Michael Cera

Barry

James Franco

Druggie

Bill Hader

Firewater/Tequila/

El Guaco

Salma Hayek

Teresa

Jonah Hill

Carl

Anders Holm

Troy

Nick Kroll

Douche

David Krumholtz

Lavash

Danny McBride

Honey Mustard

Edward Norton

Sammy

Craig Robinson

Grits

Seth Rogen

Frank/Sergeant

Pepper

Paul Rudd

Darren

Kristen Wiig

Brenda

Scott Diggs

Underwood

Gum

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Distributor

Sony Pictures

Releasing UK

US, present day. In Shopwell's supermarket, all the food items sing a song praising 'the gods' – the shoppers. Frank, a hot dog, and his girlfriend Brenda, a bun, eagerly wait to be purchased so that they can consummate their relationship. A 'god' returns a bottle of honey mustard to the store; before the mustard can tell the truth about what happens in 'the great beyond', he jumps out of the cart and commits suicide. Frank consults Firewater, a bottle of liquor, to find out what the honey mustard was talking about, and discovers that the story of the benevolent

gods is a lie invented by non-perishable items. Frank finds a cookbook and tries to show everyone in the store that the shoppers intend to eat them. One of Frank's fellow hot dogs discovers that bath salts allow humans to perceive the foods as they really are. So the foods drug the shoppers with the bath salts and murder them. No longer held back by their religious beliefs, they celebrate with a giant orgy. Firewater tells Frank he's discovered that they are all in fact cartoons, and together with Brenda and Gum, they go through a stargate to our world to find out more.

Southside with You

USA/United Kingdom 2016

Director: Richard Tanne

Certificate 12A 84m 22s

Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

Marian Robinson is not wrong: "I thought you said he's just another smooth-talking brother," as her daughter Michelle gets ready to join a colleague at a community meeting that she insists isn't a date. As *Southside with You* shows, Barack Obama was indeed a smooth-talking brother back in 1989, when he was at Harvard Law School and met Chicago attorney Michelle Robinson (who had graduated from Harvard the previous year) during a summer's work experience. And there's a lot of smooth talk in this playful, summery romance by first-time director Richard Tanne, an award-winning playwright whose stage training never overwhelms a film that's as confident and laidback as its leads.

Tika Sumpter, as Michelle, and Parker Sawyers, as Barack, convince without mimicking: the set of her jaw and his hand gestures are those that have become familiar, though here they are a little softer, shyer, still in formation. This is the film's story: not capturing the president and first lady, but suggesting how they shaped and reflected each other. The way in which the protagonists' romance moves through their relationship to blackness is ever present and finely nuanced, expressed as much through the soundtrack (including the original instrumental compositions by Stephen James Taylor, who has worked extensively with both Charles Burnett and Robert Townsend) as through the debate at the community meeting. Barack listens to Janet Jackson on his way to collect Michelle; the music of Martha and the Vandellas drifts from her parents' house as she comes to meet him; she gets out the now famous Michelle dance moves to an African drum circle during a picnic in the park; Barack describes his own parents as looking like Nat King Cole and Patsy Cline; and, once the day explicitly becomes a date, Michelle and Barack disagree over the best Stevie Wonder album but concur that he is the best, thus negotiating their relationship through a shared musical culture.

But it's the rich, ringing tones of Taylor's composition that soundtrack the wordless closing sequence, as Barack drives Michelle home after compromising her in front of Avery Goodman, their law firm's senior partner. Realising that his way with words can harm as well as heal, Barack



Talk the talk: Tika Sumpter, Parker Sawyers

– and the film – lets the music and the Chicago night carry Michelle back to him, a counterpoint to the climactic violence of *Do the Right Thing*, which is excerpted in the film as their date-night movie. For some viewers, *Southside with You* will lack the urgency of Spike Lee, but it joins the work of Barry Jenkins (*Medicine for Melancholy*, 2008) in drawing on the contemplative, discursive, philosophical strands in LA Rebellion cinema: the orature of *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), the psychogeography of *Killer of Sheep* (1978).

Chicago's South Side is very much a third protagonist here, not just a backdrop – a catalyst for the romance that grows from the moment Michelle hears Barack speak at the meeting in Altgeld Gardens. Producer Robert Teitel has a track record with Chicago films, particularly the *Barbershop* and *Soul Food* franchises, but *Southside* offers a different take on this part of the city, one that is warmly intimate in Michelle's love of her community. Her car-window view of kids playing in sprinklers suggests that a summery romance of walks in the park and ice cream after dark can be as complex, passionate, political and engaging as Lee's hyperkinetic work. Like Michelle, who speaks about challenging intersectional oppression at the law firm and schools Barack both on his assumptions about her and his aggression towards his late father, the film is more than a pretty face. But, in its visual, aural and performative delights, it honours, and brings together, its protagonists and its audience. 🍷

and a well-timed series of aperçus, many of them supplied by *Bright Lights, Big City* author turned wine columnist Jay McInerney.

The only element really missing is Kurniawan's version. Having declined to participate, he principally appears in footage shot for a prospective wine TV show during his rise to prominence. There's not quite enough here to suggest how the young man cast such a spell on intimates such as Levy and Arthur Sarkissian, both of whom still struggle to believe that their friend secretly spent so much of his time filling old bottles with bogus blends and appending home-printed labels with the occasional telltale typo.

Then again, many of the film's interview subjects marvel at the quality of Kurniawan's palate and the sophistication required to scam so many bigwigs in the wine world. "Most of these guys you couldn't fool most of the time," McInerney wryly notes. Another connoisseur is not so impressed when Levy gives him a glass of a rare vintage that he procured from Kurniawan but insists is the real deal. "Skunk juice", is this drinker's sole tasting note. 🍷

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

AI Morrow
Catherine Siméon
Based on an idea by

Nick Ware
Camera
Simon Fanthorpe
Rothwell
Frank Larson
Jean-Michel Dury
Jérôme Huguenin-
Virchaux

Edited by

James Scott
Composer
Lionel Corsini
Sound Recordist
Ludovic Elias

©Faites un voeu,
Arte France, The
Wine Film Ltd
**Production
Companies**

Met Film and Faites
un voeu present a
co-production with
Arte France, VPRO
in association with
Pandora Film Center,
Head Gear Films and
Metrol Technology
A film by Jerry
Rothwell and
Reuben Atlas
Co-funded by
the European
Union Creative
Europe MEDIA
with the support
of the Centre
national de la
cinématographie
et the Conseil
régional de
Bourgogne-
Franche-Comté
DR, SVT, yes.docuHD

In association with
YLE, APT Film and
Television Ltd
A Met Film and Faites
un voeu production
**Executive
Producers**
Phil Hunt
Stewart Le Maréchal
Maxime Owyszer
Jonny Persey
Compton Ross
Barbara Truyen
Nick Ware

In Colour
[1.78:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Dogwoof

US, the 1990s. The booming financial market spurs a dramatic spike in prices for vintage old-world wines at auction. One of the most charismatic figures in this milieu is Rudy Kurniawan, a young man who purports to hail from a wealthy Chinese family in Indonesia. A precociously gifted connoisseur and aggressive buyer of rare wines, he helps to revolutionise the formerly sleepy market throughout the 2000s. His social circle includes Hollywood figures such as Jeffery Levy and 'Rush Hour' producer Arthur Sarkissian. However, billionaire collector Bill Koch discovers that a bottle he bought from Kurniawan was counterfeit. Burgundy producer Laurent Ponsot also begins to suspect Kurniawan of selling forgeries, and his sleuthing efforts dovetail with those of a private investigator hired by Koch. Kurniawan comes under wider scrutiny when Ponsot attends a New York auction in 2008 and demands that lots containing his wines be withdrawn. An FBI investigation culminates in Kurniawan's arrest in 2012; apparent materials for forgery are found during the raid on his house in California. Further enquiries into Kurniawan's history reveal family connections to the perpetrators of massive financial crimes in Indonesia. Convicted at his trial in 2013, Kurniawan is sentenced to ten years in prison.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Robert Teitel
Tika Sumpter
Richard Tanne
Written by
Richard Tanne
**Director of
Photography**
Pat Scola
Edited by
Evan Schiff
Production Designer
Lucio Seixas
Music

Stephen James Taylor
Sound Mixer
Mario Coletta
Costume Designer
Megan Spatz

©SWY Productions,
LLC
**Production
Companies**
Miramax, Roadside
Attractions and IM
Global present in
association with

Get Lifted Film Co.
A film by Richard
Tanne
Produced by Fermion
Films Limited
Executive Producers
Stuart Ford
Glendon Palmer
Matt Jackson
John Legend
Mike Jackson
Carrie Holt de Lama
Tracey Bing
Zanne Devine

Rosanne Korenberg
Film Extracts
*Do the Right
Thing* (1989)

Cast

Tika Sumpter
Michelle Robinson
Parker Sawyers
Barack Obama
**Vanessa Bell
Calloway**
Marian Robinson

Phil Ed Van Leer
Frasier Robinson
Taylor Fondren
Janice
Deanna Reed-Foster
Bernadette
Jerod Haynes
Tommy
Gabrielle
Lott-Rogers
Rafiq
Preston Tate Jr
Kyle
Donn Carl Harper

Curtis
Tom McElroy
Avery Goodman
Stephanie Monday
Laura Goodman
Eric Morgan Stuart
DJ Eric

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Soda Pictures

Chicago South Side, 1989. Junior attorney Michelle Robinson, living at home with her parents, gets ready to attend a community meeting with Barack Obama, a summer associate at her law firm. As she is his adviser, she insists that a date would be inappropriate. But Barack is persuasive, and Michelle joins him at an exhibition of Afrocentric art before the meeting in Altgeld

Gardens, where he speaks about the need to respect others in order to get work done. Michelle remains sceptical of his rhetoric, but subsequently agrees to accompany him to the movies. However, an unpleasant encounter post-screening with one of the law firm's partners causes her to withdraw. Rather than arguing, Barack wins her back with an ice cream and a kiss.

Suicide Squad

USA 2016
Director: David Ayer
Certificate 15 122m 44s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

After the false start of Martin Campbell's *Green Lantern* (2011), which cast Angela Bassett as Amanda Waller in the hope that the character could string together a series in the same way that Samuel L. Jackson's Nick Fury managed at Marvel, Warner Brothers and DC Comics began building their 'expanded cinematic universe' with Zack Snyder's *Man of Steel* (2013) and *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016). It's an accident of development that David Ayer's *Suicide Squad* should be third in the series, arriving before higher-name-recognition properties such as *Wonder Woman* or *The Flash*.

An exposition-heavy opening – which has to fit in backstories and onscreen stats for a clutch of disparate characters – alludes to the (let's face it, temporary) death of Superman in *BvS*, and Ben Affleck's Batman is contractually obliged to pop up in flashbacks that explain how Will Smith's Deadshot and Margot Robbie's Harley Quinn went to prison (Ezra Miller's Flash does the same for Jai Courtney's Captain Boomerang). Otherwise, this isn't overly tied up by the Snyder films' continuity – but has enough trouble combining a messy tangle of newly reinvented versions of characters scarcely likely to be as familiar to audiences as Batman or Wonder Woman. Of the key players here, only the Joker has any crossover pop-culture recognition – and Jared Leto's underwhelming mad clown is very much not on the Squad.

Versions of the Suicide Squad have been around in comics since 1959, though Ayer draws mostly on the 1987 version scripted by John Ostrander (co-creator of Amanda Waller) and Adam Glass's 2011 take, part of DC's 'New 52' company-wide reboot (a curate's-egg revision, which seems likely to be stamped on DC's cinematic universe well beyond its termination in comics). Ostrander built his squad around Deadshot, a minor Batman villain given new depth, while Glass imported and gave equal play to the popular Harley Quinn,

created by Paul Dini and Bruce Timm for the TV show *Batman: The Animated Series* in 1992.

Ayer, whose previous credits include scripting *Training Day* (2001) and scripting/directing *End of Watch* (2012), is new to comic-book action: he handles the repetitive fights and supernatural demolitions with noisy confidence – the spectacle isn't as mind-numbing as Snyder (or Michael Bay) make it, but far less inventive than Marvel-affiliated work from Bryan Singer or Sam Raimi. Ayer imposes a vision on the antiheroes – trashy tattoos, gangbanger bling, pimped-out weapons – which is admirably consistent as a look but entails monotonous, unappealing characterisations. Yes, these are supposed to be a Dirty Dozen team of only-slightly-redeemable bad guys – but do they have to be such poor company?

Viola Davis aptly makes Amanda the scariest presence, murdering her own minions for witnessing events they aren't security-cleared to know about. But Smith's big-softie hitman – upset at being called "a serial killer who takes credit cards", in one of Ayer's smart lines – and Robbie's squeaky, dependent Harley – whose signature tune, a cover of Lesley Gore's 'You Don't Own Me', is horribly inapt – are just sketches of characters who've been treated with more depth in comics, cartoons (including the animated feature *Batman: Assault on Arkham*, which, despite the title, is a Suicide Squad story) and TV shows (there were Suicide Squad episodes of *Smallville* and *Arrow*). The rest of the pack struggle even to get a look-in, though Jay Hernandez's Diablo – afraid of his own powers until he really needs them – doubles as team conscience and surprise ultimate weapon.

That a film about bad guys should stumble because its own villains are dull (Enchantress) or just a nuisance (Joker) is ironic. This is yet another comics film whose undercooked big bad just stands around in a swirl of CGI pixels boring a hole in the sky (the lasting influence of anime such as *Akira* isn't often noted), making evil pronouncements and waiting to be defeated. 

Supersonic

Director: Mat Whitecross

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

"I hate the term sibling rivalry... but it's the most effective way to describe it." So says Oasis's Noel Gallagher of his infamously fractious relationship with bandmate and brother Liam, in Mat Whitecross's boisterously entertaining archival tour through the Britpop titans' triumphant years. The fraternal discord that fed many a tabloid headline, and that would ultimately finish the band, is an understandably convenient entry point for the film – one of the first things we see is the nascent group jamming at Manchester's Boardwalk, Noel quipping that he and Liam are like "those brothers from the Bible – Cable and Abel". Yet to Whitecross's credit, it doesn't overwhelm what's an expansive and lively rock doc.

By now, so much has been written and spoken about this band that you wonder if *Supersonic* can have any fresh insight to offer. The answer is not a great deal, but the film's delivery system of choice renders it compelling nonetheless. Produced by Amy and Senna's Asif Kapadia and James Gay-Rees, *Supersonic* reprises the distinctive formal strategy of those films, eschewing talking heads and narration in favour of an immersive, footage-based audiovisual scrapbook.

Supersonic arrives 20 years on from the zeitgeist-defining concerts at Knebworth that saw Oasis – and Britpop as a whole – reach a zenith of popularity (a fitting climax to the film's timeline). Glimpses of these shows bookend the footage, the enormous crowds buffeted by giant Euro 96 footballs as the band launch into their set. Whitecross is on familiar turf here: his previous film, the fictional *Spike Island*, featured another momentous gig from indie-rock lore – by The Stone Roses, Mancunians of a slightly older generation.

The film ends on a bittersweet note, Noel musing that the band should have "gone up in a puff of smoke" following Knebworth. Liam, recalling that the band could have sold out a further 18 Knebworths, is more sanguine: "We should still be playing there now." 



Don't look back: Noel Gallagher

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Charles Roven
Richard Suckle
Written by
David Ayer
Based on characters from DC
Entertainment
Director of Photography
Roman Vasyanov
Edited by
John Gilroy
Production Designer
Oliver Scholl
Music
Steven Price
Sound Design
Richard King
Costumes

Designed by
Kate Hawley
Visual Effects
MPC
Sony Pictures
Imageworks
Mammal Studios
Lola Visual Effects
Ollin VFX
Spin VFX
Scanline VFX
Hollywood
Visual Effects
Stunt Co-ordinators
Guy Norris
Glenn Suter
Layton Morrison
Sam Hargrave
Richard Norton
Terry Notary

©Warner Bros.
Entertainment
Inc. and RatPac
Entertainment, LLC
Production Companies
Warner Bros.
Pictures presents
in association
with RatPac-Dune
Entertainment an
Atlas Entertainment
production
A film by David Ayer
Executive Producers
Zack Snyder
Deborah Snyder
Colin Wilson
Geoff Johns
Steven Mnuchin

Cast
Will Smith
Floyd Lawton,
'Deadshot'
Jared Leto
The Joker
Margot Robbie
Dr Harleen Quinzel,
'Harley Quinn'
Joel Kinnaman
Rick Flag
Viola Davis
Amanda Waller
Jai Courtney
Captain Boomerang
Jay Hernandez
Diablo
Adewale
Akinuoye-Agbaje
Killer Croc

Ike Barinholtz
Captain Griggs
Scott Eastwood
Lieutenant GQ
Edwards
Cara Delevingne
June Moore,
'Enchantress'
Ezra Miller
The Flash
Adam Beach
Slipknot
Karen Fukuhara
Katana

[uncredited]
Ben Affleck
Bruce Wayne,
'Batman'

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Some screenings
presented in 3D
Distributor
Warner Bros. Pictures
International (UK)

US government covert-operations specialist Amanda Waller creates Task Force X, an expendable group made up mostly of convicted felons, to be deployed against 'metahuman' threats. Among Waller's assets is archaeologist June Moore, who is possessed by an ancient extradimensional witch, the Enchantress, and is in a relationship with Rick Flag, Task Force X's military commander. When the Enchantress goes rogue in Midway City and constructs a huge mystic

weapon, Waller calls in the Task Force: assassin Floyd Lawton (Deadshot), robber Digger Harkness (Captain Boomerang), the Joker's girlfriend Harley Quinn, mutant Killer Croc, pyrokinetic Diablo, escapist Slipknot and swordswoman Katana. Reluctantly, they defeat the Enchantress. Though given token rewards, the survivors are mostly returned to prison. Dissatisfied with Waller's approach, Bruce Wayne (Batman) sets out to assemble his own metahuman team.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
James Gay-Rees
Fiona Neilson
Simon Halfon
Editor
Paul Monaghan
Music
Rael Jones

Sound Mixer
Stevie Haywood
Production Company
Mint Pictures
Executive Producer
Asif Kapadia

Dolby Digital
In Colour
Distributor
E1 Films

A documentary about Manchester band Oasis, focusing on their rise to fame during the Britpop wave of the mid-1990s.

Tharlo

China 2015
Director: Pema Tsenden
Certificate PG 123m 33s

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

Tharlo doesn't mark the start of an authentically Tibetan cinema, but makes it impossible to ignore the case for taking a new Tibetan cinema seriously. Pema Tsenden – who was still known by the Chinese form of his name (Wanma Caidan) when he debuted with *The Silent Holy Stones* in 2005 – was already an innovative force in Tibetan literature when he began training as a director in Beijing Film Academy. *Tharlo* is his fifth feature since graduating, but he's still a prolific and increasingly popular writer, publishing in both Tibetan and Chinese, and has encouraged his former cinematographer Sonthar Gyal to direct two features. Nobody has done more to foster a Tibetan cultural renaissance.

In Chinese-controlled Tibet, that means treading carefully. The communist party's official policy is to promote and nurture ethnic diversity, but also to snuff out any criticism of Beijing's rule – let alone any hint of separatist ambitions. Like plenty of other artists around the world working under intolerant regimes, Pema Tsenden initially took Abbas Kiarostami as his model; his second feature *The Search* (2008) deliberately echoes *Through the Olive Trees* in concept and structure, although its theme and details are specifically Tibetan. His own distinctive voice emerged more clearly in *Old Dog* (2011), which explores generational conflicts and a certain endemic stubbornness; he may be one of those artists, like Jia Zhangke, whose wit is sharpened by the need to circumvent Film Bureau censors.

Shot in exquisitely judged monochrome, *Tharlo* is nothing like any Kiarostami film. It rests on a simple, understated irony: when the virginal, middle-aged shepherd Tharlo is ordered to apply for an ID card for the first time in his life, his attempt to comply ultimately costs him his identity. We discover in the opening scene that Tharlo has only one palpable asset: an excellent memory. This equips him to be a capable shepherd (he can recognise individual sheep, even in a herd of going on 400), but also powers his sole claim to fame, his ability to recite the whole of Mao Zedong's 1944 speech 'Serve the People' in Chinese. It's the speech in which Mao quoted the ancient historian Sima Qian on death, the meaning of which depends on the way a life has been lived. At the start Tharlo recites the words without any clear sense of what they mean; by the end, when several grave mistakes cause his memory to falter, he understands that his own life has become worthless.

Pema Tsenden says that the character "is typical of Tibetans of the present generation... in a state of confusion, disorientation and desensitisation". That's very likely true, but the film's triumph is that it presents Tharlo as a distinct and idiosyncratic individual, a man who prefers his nickname 'Ponytail' to his real name and who sees his actual, old-fashioned ponytail as a defining characteristic. Since Tharlo is only really at home with sheep, his awkwardness in social situations and inability to judge what others expect of him are matched by his general reluctance to speak – but his face is highly expressive, and the film's predilection for long takes gives the actor Shide Nyima (a stage actor-comedian making his film debut) great opportunities to 'say' a lot



Downfall: Shide Nyima

without words. Tharlo's downfall follows his first encounter with a gold-digger, a predatory young woman who exploits his naivety and, like Delilah, robs him of his strengths by cutting his hair. The hairdresser Yangtso is tired of small-town life and dreams of travel to Lhasa, Beijing and Hong Kong; she too was a shepherd in her childhood, but her sense of social mobility is a mystery to Tharlo.

There's a productive mismatch between the choice to film in long-held shots (most scenes are single takes, generally from a fixed angle, some involving mirrors) and the overall narrative drive, which counters a sense of inevitability by eliminating unnecessary exposition and

maintaining a steady flow of visual surprises and strong supporting characters. There's an almost Brechtian use of songs-as-commentary (including some Tibetan hip-hop from guest star Dekyi Tserang!) and some discreetly subversive play with Mao's calligraphy on the wall of the police station (the word *renmin* – 'the people' – is cheekily bisected by a vertical pillar, first head-on, then reversed in a mirror). The film doesn't chafe against China's occupation of Tibet, merely noting how alien the imposed politics and bureaucracy seem to an indigenous way of life – albeit a way of life that's changing rapidly under the pressures from outside. Tibetan culture has a new benchmark. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Gao Hong
Xu Li
Sun Jialin
Producers
Wu Lilei
Sean Wang
Screenwriter
Pema Tsenden
Cinematography

Lu Songye
Editor
Song Bing
Art Director
Daktse Dondrup
Music
Wang Jue
Sound
Dukar Tsering

©Heaven Pictures
Culture & Media
Co Ltd
Production Companies
A Heaven Pictures
(Beijing) Culture &
Media Co., Ltd, Beijing
Ocean & Time Culture
Communication

Co., Ltd, Beijing YiHe
Star Film Production
Ltd, New Heaven
Picture (Beijing)
Culture & Media Co.,
Ltd co-production
Executive Producer
Quin Ling

Cast
Shide Nyima
Tharlo
Yangshik Tso
Yangtso
Tashi
Chief Dorje
Jinpa
owner of the sheep

Dekyi Tserang
singer
Black and White
[1.85:1]
Subtitles
Distributor
Day for Night

Qinghai, Tibet, now. Tharlo, nicknamed Ponytail, has spent most of his 40-odd years as a shepherd; he guards a large flock, some of which are his own. When local police chief Dorje tells him he must get an ID card, Tharlo goes into town to get his photo taken. The photographer sends him to Yangtso's small hair salon to smarten up. Impressed by his talk of the value of his herd, Yangtso invites him to a karaoke bar and gets him drunk. Next morning he wakes in her salon; she urges him to sell his sheep and take her away to a big city. Tharlo returns to his herd but is distracted; he learns some traditional love songs for his next visit to the karaoke bar. After

a night of heavy drinking, he wakes late to find many sheep killed by wolves. The owner of the sheep is furious. Some days later Tharlo turns up at Yangtso's salon with 160,000 yuan in cash, having sold the herd. She persuades him to lose his ponytail to make himself less recognisable and that evening drags him to a hip-hop concert, where he's threatened by her former boyfriend. Next morning he wakes in the salon to find Yangtso and the money gone. He turns to Dorje for advice, but is merely told that his shaved head means that he will need a new ID photo. Tharlo's motorcycle runs out of gas on a mountain road; he lets a firecracker go off in his hand.

Two Women

France/Latvia/Russian Federation 2014
Director: Vera Glagoleva
Certificate U 103m 38s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

This handsome if melodramatic adaptation of Turgenev's *A Month in the Country* adopts one of the author's own earlier titles, which neatly fits its pared-down tale of rival female loves on a Russian country estate. For director Vera Glagoleva has ruthlessly whittled the five-act, three-hour play down to a lean and occasionally rushed 100 minutes; the film is so sternly focused on how love wreaks dramatic havoc on the sleepy provincial household that most of Turgenev's subtle commentary about the superfluity of the landed classes never makes it in, let alone the psychological acuity that was his gift to Russian drama, decades before Chekhov.

Instead, Glagoleva creates a high-shen period piece, her camera lovingly following strapping young tutor Alexey (a sheepish Nikita Volkov) romping through the sunlit estate gardens, igniting the equally hopeless passions of his bored employer Natalia and her young ward Vera. Bosoms heave and tempers fray, as Anna Astrakhantseva's shrill and capricious Natalia flirts heavily-handedly in exquisitely decorated parlours and summerhouses. Often a little maladroit itself, the film rarely catches the humour or delicacy that the play possesses, only occasionally leavening its melodrama with comedy.

Its saving grace is Ralph Fiennes, who gives a performance of notable subtlety (in Russian, mind), gently lovelorn and carefully manipulative as Natalia's long-time unrequited lover Mikhail. His scenes with Astrakhantseva are notable for the way in which her nervier, larger performance contrasts with his quiet, nuanced playing. Still, he is unafraid to reveal the dammed-up bitterness behind Mikhail's famous lecture to Alexey on the slavery of love, biting sure of "how those sweet little hands can torment you". Fiennes, along with Aleksandr Baluyev's stoical, self-denying husband Arkady, expertly conveys, during a touchingly oblique discussion of their predicament, the desperation and decency that unrequited love can engender. Alongside this,



Class war: Nikita Volkov, Anna Astrakhantseva

Astrakhantseva's crashing pursuit of Alexey feels overplayed, their brief and disruptive passion faintly absurd rather than moving. She can't seem to find the complex, guilty-but-giddy sensibility that stage portrayals (notably Helen Mirren's 1994 incarnation) have tapped into. Yet Anna Levanova's frank misery as the betrayed Vera finds a note of real tragedy, diving into a dreaded marriage to escape her shattered life.

Glagoleva compounds the film's breathless quality by underlining its emotional moments relentlessly with Sergei Banevich's tinkling or thundering piano music, or meaningful cutaways to wasps trapped in honeycombed sweetness. Clumsy in the love scenes, the script wrings some dry comedy from the practical, self-deprecating proposal of Sergey Yushkevich's cynical Dr Shpigelsky to governess Elizavetha (Sylvie Testud, sharply good in her slivers of scenes). More of this, and fewer slow, golden-lit scenes of serfs winnowing corn would have perked things up somewhat. But *Two Women* clings steadfastly to the template of the heritage film and its museum aesthetic, delivering Turgenev's story in such a romanticised form that it largely loses the mix of tragicomedy and realism for which it is well known. Where *A Month in the Country* originally cast a jaundiced eye over the last relics of a feudal regime, *Two Women* is content to present a nostalgic, uncritical celebration. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Natalia Ivanova
Adaptation
Svetlana Grudovich
Olga Pogodina
With the assistance of Vera Glagoleva
Based on Ivan Turgenev's play *A Month in the Country*
Director of Photography
Gints Berzins
Film Editor
Alexander Amirov
Production Designers
Elena Zhukova
Olga Arkhipova
Music
Sergey Banevich
Supervising Sound Editor
Peter Malafiev
Costume Designer
Elena Luklanova

Center Horosho

Production Co. Ltd
Production Companies
Co-production companies: GVI Group, Rezo Productions, Jura Podnieka Studija, Yuri Podnieka
Production company: Horosho Production
With the financial support of Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, Cinema Fund of Russia, Eurimages
Executive Producers
Maria Ksinopulo
Ekaterina Shavlova
Tim Macready
Michael Robinson
David P. Kelly

Cast

Anna Astrakhantseva
Natalia Petrovna

Ralph Fiennes

Mikhail Rakitin
Aleksander Baluyev
Arkady Islayev
Anna Levanova
Vera
Nikita Volkov
Alexey Belyaev
Sergey Yushkevich
Shpigelsky
Sylvie Testud
Elizavetha Bogdanovna
Larisa Malevannaya
Anna Semenovna
Vasily Mishchenko
Bolshintsov
Bernd Moss
Schaaf
Andrey Zanoga
Kolysa

Dolby Digital
In Colour
Subtitles

Distributor

MGR Films Limited

Provincial Russia, 1850. Bored on her country estate, wealthy wife Natalia is loved unrequitedly by long-time family friend Mikhail. She is secretly in love (as is her 17-year-old ward Vera) with young tutor Alexey. Dr Shpigelsky proposes that Vera marry elderly neighbour Bolshintsov. Natalia suggests the marriage to Vera, to remove her rival for Alexey. Vera refuses. Natalia tells Mikhail of her confusion. Her husband Arkady finds them in a consoling embrace, and requests an explanation. Natalia tells Alexey that Vera loves him. He doesn't love Vera, however, so he offers to leave. Shpigelsky asks governess Elizavetha to marry him, and she accepts. A distraught Vera tells Alexey that Natalia loves him, and berates Natalia. Natalia confesses her love to Alexey, and they embrace in the summerhouse. Arkady offers to give up Natalia to Mikhail. Natalia begs Vera's forgiveness. Mikhail lectures Alexey on the torments and humiliation of love. Vera tells Shpigelsky that she will marry Bolshintsov, to get away. Alexey returns to Moscow, leaving a note for the devastated Natalia. Mikhail saves Natalia's marriage by telling Arkady that Alexey left because Vera was in love with him. That night, the homemade fireworks that Alexey had created wake Natalia. She is saddened to find serfs, not Alexey, lighting them.

Under the Shadow

Director: Babak Anvari

See interview on page 10

Reviewed by Roger Clarke

There's nothing new about a ghost story in which a lone mother must protect her child or children from supernatural forces, but there is something

new about its context in this film. *Under the Shadow* is ostensibly set in Tehran in 1988 (though filmed by UK-based Iranian director Babak Anvari in Jordan), and its newness lies in a fresh and informed twist on Islamic and pre-Islamic belief systems, since it is a story about the djinn, supernatural creatures mentioned in *The 1,001 Nights*, the Hadith and the Koran. Since ghost-belief is very much influenced by era and culture, djinns are variously described by the scholarly as downgraded pagan gods (there were originally 360 worshipped in pre-Islamic Mecca), generic unclean spirits given to possessing humans, or simply a divinely ordained society of unusual spiritual beings set between mankind and the angels. Increasingly, though, they're perceived as something nearer to the 'poltergeist' of Hollywood cinema, almost entirely malignant non-corporeal creatures that like to meddle with domestic situations, cause fright and create divisions between parent and child. They mess with the heads of people in stress situations, a cognitive drama that serves very well in film.

We begin with a young woman, Shideh, pleading with a stony-faced university bureaucrat to be allowed back on a medical course; she yearns to be a doctor. But she will never be admitted back to medical school, he tells her, after her radical leftwing politics were noted during the Iranian Revolution in 1979. She claims it was the folly of youth, but they both know this isn't true. She is indeed thoroughly westernised, throwing off her scarf as soon as she's home and, whenever she can, dancing to a Jane Fonda exercise tape in her VCR. As soon as she steps outside the flat, however, both the war and the increasingly religious, paternalistic environment hit her hard. It doesn't help that her rather sweet-natured and understanding husband Iraj, whose medical career she now resents, is drafted by the army for his annual one-month attendance at the front.

He begs his angry wife to take their daughter Dorsa to the safety of his parents. But she won't budge. She throws out all her medical books except one, inscribed by her late mother, who always wanted her to be a doctor. Her husband leaves. Occasionally he rings up. The line is bad; you keep expecting something nasty to emerge from the crackle, but it's always him. Even when he's still at the flat, spooky things are beginning to happen – the daughter has nightmares, she's scared of the bathroom – but when Iraj leaves, the ante is upped. Shideh is disturbed by the boy in a neighbouring flat, who seems to be spooking Dorsa with tales of evil ghosts in the house. Then, as if to confirm it, a large Iraqi missile hits the roof but doesn't explode. Soon everyone is leaving the building. Dorsa is frantic with worry about her abducted doll. Shideh begins to have those waking-up-in-your-dreams nightmares. Knocks on the door draw her out on to a stairwell, only for a ghostly hijab, like a kind of skeletal flag, to swoosh into the apartment. Worse, Dorsa appears to prefer this ghost-mother to her real one.



Walls have fears: Avin Manshadi

Yes, there's a bit of *The Devil's Backbone* (2001) in the ticking bomb, a bit of *The Babadook* (2014) in the single-mother vulnerabilities and the trashcan infelicities (did the ghost throw it out/did the child?), a bit of *Mama* (2013) in the mothering issues, and a touch of Japanese horror in the vision of the daughter's face reduced to little but an enormous mouth (the folkloric Ohaguro-bettari yokai).

This is more conventional and less stylised than that other para-Iranian horror *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2014). Its ancestor is certainly Nakata Hideo's *Dark Water* (2002), though it suffers in comparison with that masterpiece of the genre. Childhood possessions come and go on the whim of the elemental entity – a red bag in Nakata, a doll here. A crack on the ceiling (a water stain in *Dark*

Water) speaks of a leaking/splintering of sanity in the mother. For the djinn, it is a portal, which Shideh tries to tape up. How-mad-is-the-mother questions lurk, as they always do in such movies.

The ensemble acting is solid rather than exceptional, but the two female leads are excellent. The filming style and palette are usually restrained and muted, with some handheld close ups, the odd prowling camera move to suggest a presence and some straight-up and unapologetic trick-shots in the dream sequences. The soundtrack plays effectively with the idea that these unclean spirits, made out of smokeless fire, travel restlessly on the air, and so the mournful wail of wind, the air-raid klaxon and sometimes a call to prayer murmur remorselessly in the background, and are all equally a threat. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Lucan Toh
Emily Leo
Oliver Roskill
Written by
Babak Anvari
Director of
Photography
Kit Fraser
Editor

Chris Barwell
Production Designer
Nasser Zoubi
Music
Gavin Cullen
Sound Designer
Alex Joseph
Costume Designer
Phaedra Dahdaleh

Production Companies
Wigwam Films
Supported by Doha
Film Institute
Executive Producers
Sanjay Shah
Nick Harbinson
Patrick Fischer
Duncan McWilliam

Khaled Haddad

Cast
Narges Rashidi
Shideh
Avin Manshadi
Dorsa
Bobby Naderi
Iraj

Ray Haratian
landlord
Arash Marandi
Aram Ghasemy
Soussan Farrokhnia
Behi Djanati Atai
Hamidreza Djavdan
Bijan Daneshmand
In Colour

[2.35:1]
Subtitles
Distributor
Vertigo Films

Tehran, 1988, during the Iran-Iraq War. Shideh is making one last effort to gain readmittance to medical school after being removed for her involvement in leftwing politics some years earlier. The implacable school principal makes it clear that she is finished as a student. Shideh returns home, miserable and defeated, and picks a fight with her doctor husband Iraj after throwing away all her medical books save one, inscribed by her late mother. Iraj reveals that he is being drafted for the war effort. He begs Shideh to take their daughter Dorsa out of Tehran. Shideh refuses. A small boy in a neighbouring apartment frightens Dorsa with stories about djinns – evil spirits – and Dorsa begins to have

nightmares. Iraj leaves for the front. The apartment block is hit by an Iraqi missile, which miraculously doesn't explode. Everyone leaves the building except Shideh and Dorsa, the little girl inconsolable after the disappearance of her doll. In a showdown with several spiritual djinn entities – an amorphous beast that slides through the ceiling and an animated hijab intent on stealing Dorsa away – Shideh manages to bundle her daughter into a car and flee. However, she leaves behind her mother's inscribed book, and doesn't notice that the head of the doll is missing. The final scene implies that the djinns will therefore continue to haunt Shideh and Dorsa in their new location.

War Dogs

USA 2016
Director: Todd Phillips
Certificate 15 114m 2s

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

This 'and finally' story about the Iraq and Afghanistan wars from Todd Phillips, director of the *Hangover* trilogy, is badly misconceived, but not in the way one might have expected. Indeed, the *Hangover* treatment – actually quite merciless towards its characters – might have been the better option here. *War Dogs* somehow manages to be a sob story about an arms dealer who went into it with his eyes open and came out with a slapped wrist and a suitcase full of dough.

The 'war dogs' of the title are small-time operators who bid on US defence contracts – all listed on a public website – undercutting the corporations by obtaining their wares from dubious sources in Eastern Europe. Based in Miami, Efraim Diveroli (Jonah Hill) and David Packouz (Miles Teller) are distinguished by their youth, winning multimillion-dollar contracts in their early twenties. (Their start-up capital came from a local dry-cleaning magnate.) Diveroli is the loose cannon who founded the business, Packouz the nice guy who gets involved because his girlfriend falls pregnant, and it's Packouz who narrates his own seduction and downfall – fairly easily arrested, as it turns out.

Diveroli has a *Scarface* poster on the wall of his office, and at points *War Dogs* seems intended to come off like *Goodfellas*, with Packouz in the Henry Hill role, inexorably drawn into 'the life', but the attempt is bathetic. The arms trade as rendered by Phillips has none of the dark appeal of Scorsese's underworld, and besides, Packouz didn't grow up surrounded by arms dealers, nor do arms dealers become his family. What's more, he marched against the Iraq War, so it's impossible to credit his babe-in-the-woods routine about not realising that arms dealing is a shady business. If, on the other hand, Phillips is trying to portray Packouz as a *Goodfellas* fan who has deceived himself that he is like Henry Hill – not an unreasonable surmise – then he forgot to inform Teller, who delivers the voiceover as if he truly believes his character is a tragic victim of circumstance.

The true story on which *War Dogs* is based was first published as a *Rolling Stone* feature, and Diveroli and Packouz's



Two guys and a gun trade: Jonah Hill, Miles Teller

adventures in the Middle East and Balkans are supposed to have a gonzo flavour, but this is oversold – the film can't conceal the fact that the business of shipping arms is a largely tedious one of obtaining permits. They are eventually done for repackaging Chinese ammo and falsifying their accounts.

There is a strange moment at the end, when fictional big-time arms dealer Henry Girard (Bradley Cooper) says that he likes the arms trade because there aren't many women in it – a line that can only be taken as defiantly self-referential on Phillips's part. As Packouz's girlfriend Iz, Ana de Armas has what could serve as a parody of the Hollywood 'girlfriend' role: entirely defined by her relationship, and apparently perfect, not even given the chance to be morally compromised but able of course to forgive others for their compromises. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Mark Gordon Todd Phillips Bradley Cooper	Entertainment, LLC	Bradley Cooper Henry Girard
Screenplay Stephen Chin Todd Phillips Jason Smilovic Based on the Rolling Stone article <i>Arms & the Dudes</i> by Guy Lawson	Production Companies A Warner Bros. Pictures presentation In association with RatPac-Dune Entertainment A Joint Effort/Mark Gordon Company production A Todd Phillips movie	Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]
Director of Photography Lawrence Sher	Executive Producers David Siegel Brett Ratner Scott Rudnick Mark O'Connor Bryan Ziff	Distributor Warner Bros. Pictures International (UK)
Editor Jeff Groth	Film Extracts Young <i>Frankenstein</i> (1974)	
Production Designer Bill Brzeski	Cast Jonah Hill Efraim Diveroli Miles Teller David Packouz Ana de Armas Iz	
Music Cliff Martinez		
Sound Mixer Mark Weingarten		
Costume Designer Michael Kaplan		
Stunt Coordinator Gary M. Hymes		
©Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. and RatPac-Dune		

In flashback, David Packouz narrates his experience as an arms dealer at the height of the Iraq War 'surge'. Having dropped out of college, Packouz reconnects with old school friend Efraim Diveroli, who supplies the US military with arms and equipment. When his girlfriend Iz falls pregnant, Packouz goes into business with Diveroli, lying to Iz, who like him is theoretically anti-war. When a shipment of pistols destined for the Iraqi police is impounded in Jordan, Diveroli and Packouz have to fly to the Middle East to resolve the problem, and end up driving the guns across Iraq themselves. As well as enriching them, their entrepreneurial activities impress the US military, and they scale up their business to take on bigger deals. Diveroli and Packouz become middlemen for Henry Girard, a well-known arms dealer who is banned from trading directly with the US and who has access to vast stockpiles of arms in Albania. Diveroli and Packouz win the contract by undercutting their competitors by more than \$50 million, which Diveroli regrets to such an extent that he tries to cut Girard out of the deal. As a result, Girard threatens Packouz. Packouz decides to quit the arms trade, but Diveroli refuses to compensate him. Later, the FBI arrests them both for breaking the US arms embargo with China and falsifying their accounts. Diveroli serves time in jail, while Packouz spends a brief spell under house arrest.

War on Everyone

United Kingdom 2015
Director: John Michael McDonagh
Certificate 15 97m 38s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Writer-director John Michael McDonagh evidently knows and loves his 70s cop movies and TV shows, so while this New Mexico-set police procedural unfolds in the present day, it's decorated with myriad pastiche elements taking us back to the era of *Freebie and the Bean*, *Starsky & Hutch*, gas-guzzling saloons with squealing tyres, and a more tolerant attitude towards maverick detectives and sexual/ethnic stereotyping. Hence odd-couple bad-boy cops Michael Peña (unruffled family man) and Alexander Skarsgård (boozy volatile loner) kick things off with a throwaway gag where they run over a drug dealer in full Marcel Marceau get-up just to see if he screams before he mounts the bonnet of their retro vehicle, thus establishing a context of knowing, non-PC knockabout, with perhaps half an eye on the realities of the operational conduct of US law enforcement. For all the trail of blackmail, automotive destruction and bashed-about suspects they leave behind, these two have never actually shot anyone, which presumably flags up a comparison between the milieu of vintage *policiers* and the even more chastening realities unfolding on the streets of today's US cities.

Whether the film actually earns the right to be taken at all seriously is another matter. Where the humour in McDonagh's 2011 debut *The Guard* worked through the incongruity of a Garda officer more hardboiled than the FBI agents who'd strayed on to his territory, the rural Irish settings gave a believable grounding for the outrageous comedy to spark against. Here, though, for all the visual value the film gets out of its New Mexico locations (from 70s-looking civic architecture to rugged desert and mountains), the whole thing plays like a generic cop-movie construct, rendered even more artificial by myriad cultural reference points high and low – from Glen Campbell to Huggy Bear to Simone de Beauvoir. Unlike Tarantino, McDonagh is keen to announce that he's spent time in an actual library, not just a video library. But while certain



Copping on: Michael Peña, Alexander Skarsgård

micro-details are spot-on (the cut to horses exiting the stalls at a racetrack is a classic cop-movie transition), the film unfortunately labours to keep us interested in its procedural plot, as the two detectives' eagerness to snaffle the proceeds of a racetrack robbery eventually brings them face to face with the mastermind behind the heist.

Maybe it's because McDonagh's seemingly endless cleverness leaves us too punch-drunk to react, but – like his sibling Martin's cumulatively wearing 2012 genre frolic *Seven Psychopaths* – the movie is pretty much dead on its feet by the final reel. No fault of the disarmingly loopy Skarsgård or indeed Peña's consistently amiable poise, but a belated attempt to glorify these previously cynical scoundrels by having them take a moral stand against a Mr Big guilty of the vilest sexual crimes does come across as a wholly flip, superficial plot device – not least in comparison to the authentic moral indignation burning throughout McDonagh's 2014 feature *Calvary*. True, that film set quite a high watermark, but McDonagh here shows that pop-savvy joshing and real-world seriousness make a tricky combination. A disappointment, it's fair to say. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers Chris Clark Flora Fernandez Marengo Phil Hunt Compton Ross	Edited by Chris Gill	British Film Institute Production Companies Bankside Films, BFI in association with Head Gear Films, Kreo Films and Metrol Technology	Natascha Wharton Ben Roberts Fenella Ross Elliot Ross	Jackie Hollis Caleb Landry Jones Russell Birdwell David Wilmot Pádraic Power Malcolm Barrett Reggie X Stephanie Sigman Dolores Bolaño Paul Reiser Lt. Gerry Stanton Theo James	Lord James Mangan Zion Leyba Danny
Written by John Michael McDonagh	Production Designer Wynn P. Thomas	Original Music Lorne Balfe			
Director of Photography Bobby Bukowski	Original Music Lorne Balfe	Sound Mixer Darryl L. Frank			
	Costume Designer Terry Anderson	Executive Producers Hilary Davis Stephen Kelliher	Cast Michael Peña Bob Bolaño Alexander Skarsgård Terry Monroe Tessa Thompson		In Colour [2.35:1]
					Distributor Icon Film Distribution

New Mexico, present day. Detective partners Bob Bolaño and Terry Monroe, whose methods are violent and unscrupulous, are warned by their precinct chief that one more suspension will mean they're off the force.

An unexpected gathering of ne'er-do-wells alerts Bob and Terry that a major crime is being planned, so they blackmail regular informer Reggie, who points them towards former stripper Jackie Hollis, girlfriend of criminal gang member Clifford Reynard. They extract a payment from Clifford in exchange for his freedom, but he's later fatally stabbed at home by his wife, causing his son Danny to take flight. Reggie subsequently puts Bob and Terry off the scent, while he holds up the local racetrack in a heist masterminded by aristocratic Englishman

Lord James Mangan. Bob and Terry later track Reggie down in Iceland to learn of Mangan's role in the operation. Later, back in New Mexico, loner Terry finds new love with Jackie and adopts the runaway Danny. He also gives chase to Mangan's cohort Birdwell, and assaults him so severely that he loses an eye. Mangan now menaces both detectives and, when they harass him in turn, files a complaint, which prompts their chief to fire them.

When Danny reveals that in fact he stabbed his father, because the latter offered him to Mangan's paedophile gang to be abused, Bob and Terry kill Mangan and his henchmen, then steal the cash from the track robbery. Bob and his family and Terry, Jackie and Danny retire to Iceland with the proceeds.



SUBSCRIBE TO

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

Sight&Sound

12 MONTHS PRINT+DIGITAL*



£45 (UK)
£68 (WORLDWIDE)

* Pay by
Direct Debit (UK)
and get a
FREE
BFI DVD

12 MONTHS DIGITAL



£30 (UK/WORLDWIDE)
**INCLUDES A TWO-
YEAR ARCHIVE
OF BACK ISSUES**

COMPLETE ONLINE ARCHIVE

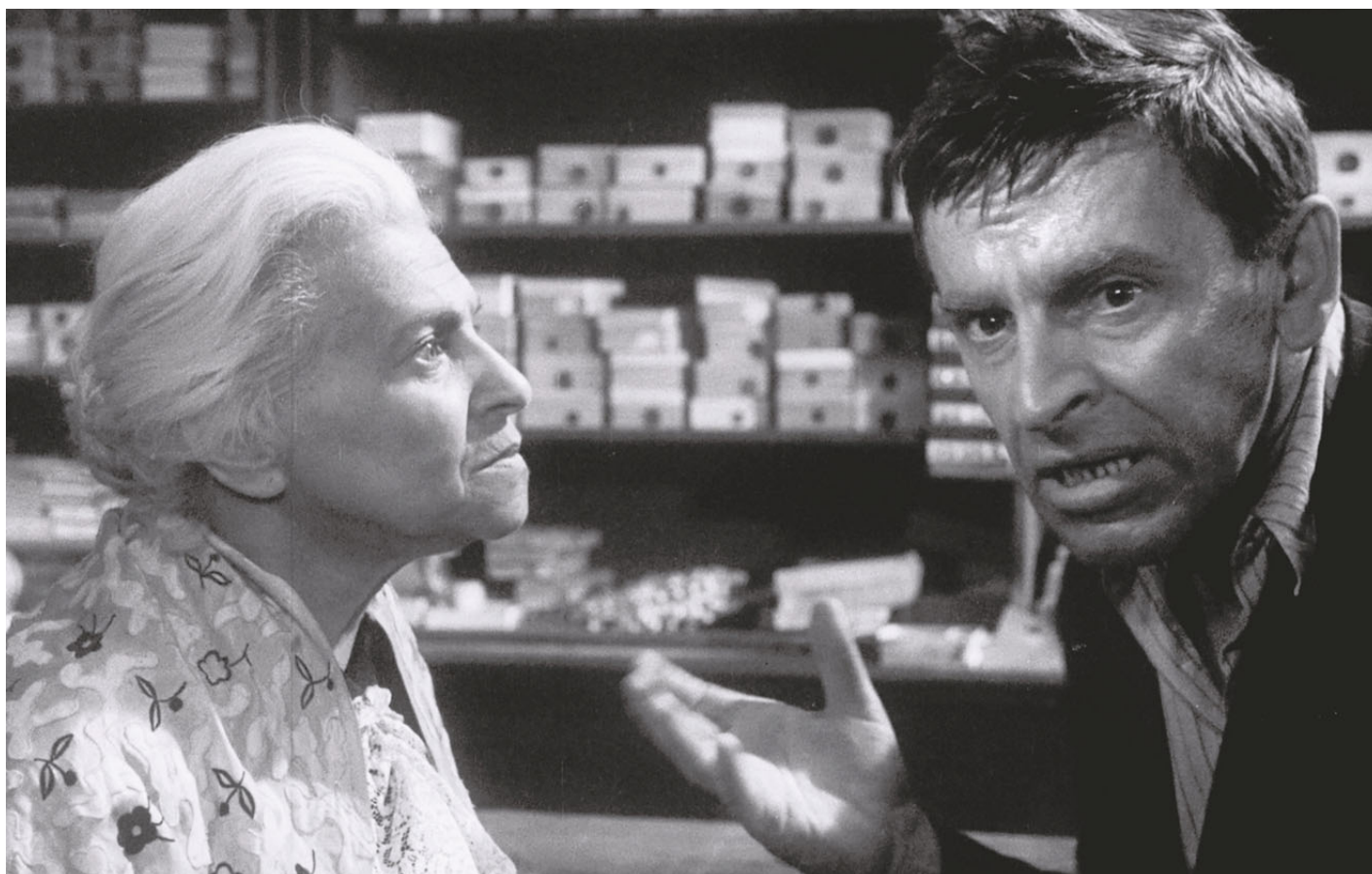


£20 (ADDITIONAL ANNUAL FEE
FOR SUBSCRIBERS ONLY)
**80+ YEARS OF SIGHT &
SOUND AND MONTHLY
FILM BULLETIN**

Image: *The Assassin* –
voted the best film of 2015
by Sight & Sound

bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/subscribe
+44 (0) 20 8955 7070

Home cinema



Ordinary people: Ida Kaminska and Josef Kroner in *The Shop on the High Street*

NIGHTMARE ON MAIN STREET

A 'good' man finds himself on the wrong side of history in this masterpiece from the Czech New Wave

THE SHOP ON THE HIGH STREET

Ján Kadar and Elmar Klos; Czechoslovakia 1965; Second Sight/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 125 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: appreciation by Michael Brooke; original US press book

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

The standard line on this Oscar-winner for Best Foreign Film has long been that it was the gateway movie that alerted global audiences and critics to the wonders of the 1960s Czech New Wave – in the same way that Kurosawa, say, opened Western eyes to post-war Japanese film, or Herzog and Fassbinder flagged up the emergence of the New German Cinema.

With this first ever release on Blu-ray likely to introduce Ján Kadar and Elmar Klos's masterpiece to a whole new audience, however, it's clear that this familiar thumbnail assessment offers only a partial summation of the film's significance. First, its key creative partners

weren't actually among the Prague Film School graduates (including Milos Forman, Vera Chitilová and Jiri Menzel) who came to define the Czech New Wave, since the much older Kadar (born 1918) and Klos (born 1910) had a feature track record going back over a decade, involving sundry scrapes with the authorities along the way. Second, although *The Shop on the High Street* was a production of Barrandov Studios in Prague, culturally it's very much a Slovak film, shot in a small town in the north-east and dramatising a very specific historical moment during the 1939-45 Slovak State.

That's the thing. For a film that constitutes one of the screen's most potent representations of the Holocaust, you have to look very hard for a swastika. Instead, the black uniforms here sport the double-cross insignia denoting the so-called Hlinka Guard, who carried out the anti-Semitic legislation set down by the new Slovak State as it sought to establish friendly credentials with the Nazis occupying the Czech territory next door. All of which explains how, in 1942, when the film is set, the Jewish community in a pleasant, ordinary town could find themselves herded into the civic square and loaded up for transportation to the Nazi camps as, all

the while, the Slovak neighbours they'd lived beside for years simply stood by and watched.

For co-director Kadar, a Slovakian of Hungarian-Jewish descent who was interned in Hungary during the war and lost almost all his family in Auschwitz, this adaptation of Ladislav Grosman's novella *The Trap* was evidently a deeply personal undertaking. As well as expressing deep sympathy for the Jewish victims – and consciously avoiding any visual reference to the horrors of the camps – the material also generates a timeless resonance by exploring, through its easygoing local carpenter Tono, how a kindly, decent yet lackadaisical individual can find themselves on the wrong side of history.

As played by the splendid Josef Kroner, here's a guy who's always stayed out of politics and whose default solution to everything is to keep his head down and hope it will all go away. His brother-in-law, on the other hand, has twigged

This is not merely some lauded exemplar of a moment in arthouse history but very much a film for now – and always

that donning the uniform of the Hlinka Guard offers him a unique opportunity to line his pockets. Since Tono is under pressure at home to bring home a bit more bacon, he accepts the offer to become the 'Aryan controller' of old Mrs Lautmann's haberdashery shop on the high street. The prospect of a lucrative income without having to do anything for it proves too tempting to resist, but the challenge of explaining to Ida Kaminska's elderly and infirm proprietress how and why he's the store's new owner utterly defeats him. Instead, he tries to help this sweet old lady about the shop and restore her ancient furniture, but a reckoning is looming... and he's increasingly aware that the Hlinka Guard reserve their harshest treatment for 'Jew-lovers'.

While Kadár and Klos didn't really go on, either separately or together, to have the careers they perhaps should have, their level of mastery is thoroughly engrossing. Weighty subject matter notwithstanding, so much of the film has that distinctively Czech (or even Slovak?) humour – also seen in Forman's *The Fireman's Ball* (1967) – which observes small-town bumbling with a certain wry bemusement. Tono's inability to get to grips with the concept of the sabbath and Mrs Lautmann's unerring knack of misconstruing his intentions play out as a bittersweet comedy of miscommunication, while the pompous preening of the Guard is played for ridicule – until the wheels of fascist bureaucracy start to grind and the jokes just aren't funny any more.

Stylistically, too, the directors absolutely nail it. Early on, the camera effectively moseys around, taking in domestic tribulations, folks out for a Sunday stroll and an adorable mutt named Essenc. But by the time the town-square tannoy is calling out the names of the deportees, it has taken on a much more oppressive role, positively hounding Tono as he paces around the shop – a telling formal expression of the conscience he cannot escape.

The fear that falls over the old dear's face when she finally grasps the reality of her situation remains, like the overgrown train tracks in *Shoah* (1985), one of the indelible images of Holocaust cinema. Yet the plight of Kroner's essentially amiable handyman cuts even deeper. When social inequity and nationalist insecurity combine, this perennial idler finds himself going with the flow. 'I' becomes 'We', and that 'We' is quite prepared to stand on a few heads if it's only an outsider minority that will get hurt. The contemporary resonances are so obvious they hardly need pointing out, making this not merely some lauded exemplar of a particular moment in arthouse history but very much a film for now – and always. A particular boon, too, to have it in such a pristine new edition.

A brand new transfer from the Czech National Film Archive does a sterling job of controlling the film's potentially problematic but intentionally expressive use of overexposed white light. Wisely prefaced with a spoiler alert, Michael Brooke's 40-minute appreciation offers an exemplary guide to the film's historical and production context, artistic qualities and contemporary reception. All very sound. 

New releases

AROUND CHINA WITH A MOVIE CAMERA

China/UK 1900-48; BFI/Region 2 DVD; 68 minutes;

1.33:1; Features: score, essays, two shorts

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

Shot by missionaries, diplomats, amateurs, travelogue-makers, war correspondents, newsreel cameramen and possibly even a Conservative MP, the films in this BFI presentation offer a shimmering portrait of a lost China. It's a collection of archive film from the first half of the 20th century that reveals the country as it was before communism, and travels along its roads, rivers, canals and coastline, from the exotic serenity of Kunming opium-smokers in 1902 to the more familiar elegance of 1930s Shanghai. The digitally restored footage has all been retrieved from the BFI National Archive, and like the way of life it depicts, most of it has barely been seen for decades.

The clips are run together, grouped by region rather than date, with brief title cards to situate each fragment, offering where possible information about who shot the footage. Each scene teems with social, political and architectural history, but there is also purely aesthetic pleasure to be found. The appeal of the picturesque scenery, palatial structures and embellished costumes in many of these clips is enhanced by vivid tinting and toning. *An Oriental Venice*, a 1925 travelogue of the Grand Canal in Hangzhou, is rendered in sugary Pathécolor, transforming actuality footage into a living, stencil-painted postcard.

Ruth Chan's newly composed score for the collection is just as beautiful, sympathetically combining traditional Chinese instruments and styles with western sounds. One of the clearest narratives to emerge from the vignettes on this disc is the creeping modernisation and westernisation of China, from motor-cars, illuminated shop signs and men wearing suits and ties in Beijing and Hong Kong to British troops marching into Shanghai in 1927. That process continues beyond the scope of the DVD, too. While gazing at the wooden boats

mooring in Hong Kong harbour in the 1920s, most viewers will be able to conjure the shadows of today's towering skyscrapers.

This disc reminds us of what has been blocked from our view over the past century of change.

Disc: The restored footage is clear and mostly very clean, with bright tints. Extras comprise two complete short travelogue films from 1907 and 1910, and useful booklet essays from curator Edward Anderson and composer Ruth Chan.

CONVERSATION PIECE

Luchino Visconti; Italy/France 1974; Eureka/Masters

of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD

Dual Format; 120 minutes; Certificate 18; 2.35:1;

Features: two language versions, interview with

Alessandro Bencivenni, featurette 'Luchino Visconti

– the Quest for the Impossible', trailer, booklet

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

In the summer of 1972, while completing his ambitious 19th-century drama *Ludwig* (1973), Luchino Visconti suffered a stroke. He was to survive another four years but his activities were severely restricted. His last two films, *Conversation Piece* (1974) and *L'innocente* (1976), were essentially chamber pieces, studio shot with few exteriors.

Even so, *Conversation Piece* (as Pasquale Iannone argues in his booklet note) shouldn't be written off as a minor work; it's rich with themes that resonate throughout Visconti's work. In particular, links to *Senso* (1954) and *Death in Venice* (1971), both dealing with the destructive effects of erotic obsession, aren't far to seek.

Not surprisingly, the film is also darkened by premonitions of death. The unnamed Professor (Burt Lancaster, 60 at the time but playing older) leads a quiet, reclusive life in his old-fashioned Rome apartment, surrounded by his books and paintings. This hermit-like existence is rudely broken into by an obnoxious marchesa (Silvana Mangano) and her entourage: her teenage daughter, the daughter's boyfriend and the marchesa's lover Konrad (Austrian actor Helmut Berger, Visconti's own lover for the final years of his life). This rowdy bunch browbeat the Professor into renting them his upstairs apartment, which they subject to a brutal modernist makeover. Despite himself, the Professor becomes increasingly fascinated by the intruders, especially Konrad.

The clash between tradition and modernity might well sum up Visconti himself; the Catholic Marxist aristocrat. Dominique Sanda and Claudia Cardinale make touching brief, unbilled appearances in flashback as the Professor's mother and wife; but an attempt to insert contemporary political relevance (the marchesa's husband, we learn, was implicated in an attempted fascist coup) feels superfluous.

Disc: English- and Italian-language versions are offered; in both cases the



Flashpoint: *Conversation Piece*

New releases

dubbing is obtrusive. Alessandro Bencivenni's introduction fluently sets the scene, and the hour-long featurette deploys vivid reminiscences from the film's cast and crew.

CRY OF THE CITY

Robert Siodmak; USA 1948; BFI/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 96 minutes; 1.37:1;

Features: commentary, appreciation, trailer, booklet

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

This fascinating prototype for many subsequent trends – the grudging mutual respect between cop and crook (*Heat*), the vivid depiction of New York's ethnic subcultures (*Mean Streets*) – is rarely ranked among Robert Siodmak's greatest *noirs*, given that the competition includes *Phantom Lady* (1944), *The Killers* (1946) and *Criss Cross* (1949), but the fact that this disc comes with three separate in-depth critical appraisals (Adrian Martin's full-length commentary, Adrian Wootton's video appreciation and Frank Krutnik's booklet essay) is testament to the riches buried beneath its gleaming, neon-lit surface.

Although Victor Mature gets top billing as the dogged police lieutenant Candella, the film largely belongs to the underrated Richard Conte (star of the recently reissued *Thieves' Highway*, made the following year) as criminal Martin Rome. Not exactly a Hitchcock-style innocent, since his killing of a cop has already been established beyond doubt, Rome is nonetheless keen to clear at least some of his name after being framed over a jewel robbery, using what little time he has left before his date with the electric chair.

The nailbitingly suspenseful set pieces – the stage-by-stage escape from the prison hospital, the illicit emergency surgery by streetlight that's threatened with exposure by a drunken lech, the complex interplay around an incriminating subway locker – are as effective as anything in Siodmak's distinguished back catalogue. There are some great supporting turns too, including Berry Kroeger's skin-crawlingly loathsome opportunist of an attorney, Shelley Winters's ditzy showgirl and, above all, the six-foot-two Hope Emerson as a terrifying masseuse, her fingers switching from caressing to choking in the blink of an eye.

The other thing the film has in common with Martin Scorsese's *Mean Streets* is that it was mostly shot in Los Angeles, with only a smattering of authentic New York location work, but both films hide this beautifully. And the vivid depiction of Rome's family milieu is particularly effective here, not least when his younger brother Tony (Tommy Cook) throws eavesdropping cops off the scent by conducting a possibly incriminating phone conversation in Italian.

Disc: A vast improvement on the BFI's previous DVD release (2007), with a high-definition picture that's leaps and bounds over its disappointingly fuzzy predecessor. The already mentioned extras are also far superior, and this new edition retains the misleading but historically revealing trailer – which, as Krutnik points out, suggests 1948 audiences had more of a penchant for location-shot 'authenticity' than the studio stylisation that had previously been so characteristic of the *noir* genre.

THE EARLY WORKS OF RAINER WERNER FASSBINDER

LOVE IS COLDER THAN DEATH/KATZELMACHER

Rainer Werner Fassbinder; West Germany 1969;

Arrow Academy/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 89/89 minutes; 1.85:1/1.37:1; Features: Fassbinder shorts

'The City Tramp' and 'The Little Chaos'; 1970 German

TV documentary 'End of the Commune?'; interview

with actor Ulli Lommel; 'Katzelmacher' trailer

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Dating from 1969, Fassbinder's first and second features wouldn't be anyone's first picks from his extensive filmography, but they're anything but negligible – not least because of the sheer attitude positively leaping from the screen.

Both spring from the Anti-Theater stage company the 24-year-old headed at the time, and share somewhat theatrical tableaux and a fascination with modes of performance, even if the first, *Love Is Colder Than Death*, opens with a massed cinephile dedication to Chabrol, Jean-Marie Straub and the characters of Damiano Damiani's 1966 Zapata western *A Bullet for the General*.

What most viewers will pick up on in this ersatz gangster pic, however, is the young Ulli Lommel doing Belmondo doing Bogart as a trigger-happy fedora-wearing wannabe whose posing masks, as it does for Fassbinder-the-actor's loose-cannon pimp and Hanna Schygulla's canny prostitute, a desperate jostling for power and status within the story's triangular relationship.

Nowadays the film's in-quotes self-reflexivity and provocative long takes come over as amiably playful, but the premiere crowd at 1969's Berlin Film Festival didn't see it that way. "It's narcissism!" comes a heartfelt post-credits cry from the stalls in a memorable moment from the German TV doc included here, which also records the simmering antipathy among Fassbinder's repertory company, eager for democratic working methods but only too aware who's calling the shots.

Fassbinder's insouciant cool at a hostile Berlin press conference is another highlight, though it does seem as though he took some of the criticism on board, since his next film, *Katzelmacher*, is definitely a tighter, more focused offering. Its portrait of Bavarian youth all riled up by the presence of a foreign worker – Fassbinder again, as Yorgos, "a Greek from Greece" – uses boxy framing, and unrelenting

frontal compositions to deliver a miserabilist fresco of insecurity and hypocrisy that's somehow bleak and darkly amusing all at the same time.

We're still years away from his discovery of Sirk and a more accessible narrative style, but the tang of the true Fassbinder is certainly apparent already – and not unimpressive.

Disc: Both films benefit significantly from a new 4k transfer for Blu-ray, which resolves a lot of visual texture the previous Arrow DVDs could only hint at. Lovers of the succulent grain structure of late-1960s black-and-white stock will surely relish this one. The Fassbinder shorts have curiosity value, while Joachim von Mengershausen's fly-on-the-wall doc is an illuminating and enjoyable component of an attractive overall package.

GORILLA BATHES AT NOON

Dušan Makavejev; Germany 1993; Facets/

All-region NTSC; 83 minutes; 1.37:1

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Once, Dušan Makavejev was a rocket of the 60s, with a gestalt food-fight aesthetic in which Marxism, sex, capitalism, history, repression, freedom and social inhibitions were all crispy kindling for crazed dialectical bonfires. This low-bore semi-farce, his last feature, sees him being made obsolete by history, as he dawdles in the Berlin of a reunited Germany, following a lost, clownish Russian guard left behind (Svetozar Cvetkovic) as he wanders in picaresque fashion through markets, the zoo, junkyards, McDonald's, underground rebel hideouts, the Brandenburg Gate etc, even as the filmmaker cuts ironically to the melodramatic Russian propaganda hit of 1950, *The Fall of Berlin*.

Communism is gone, and all is well, if bafflingly so; Makavejev seems to have nothing left but to hurl fruit. Babies are diapered in old German flags, and the ghost of Lenin (Anita Mancin in drag) loiters around, steering us towards an arresting climax: the dismantling of the 19-metre Nikolai Tolsky granite statue of Lenin, giant head first, surreally evoking memories of both Theodoros Angelopoulos's *Ulysses' Gaze* (two years later) and Makavejev's own *Sweet Movie* (1974), with its vast papier-mâché Marx mug floating on a barge down a Dutch canal. The metaphoric force of the statue's destruction is worth the film – and suggests, as his earlier movies did, that Makavejev would've made an eloquent if impishly untrustworthy documentarian.

Disc: Adequate transfer, no extras.

HANGMEN ALSO DIE!

Fritz Lang; USA 1943; Arrow Academy/Region B Blu-ray

and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate PG; 134 minutes;

1.37:1; Features: commentary by Richard Peña, Reinhard

Heydrich documentary, restoration comparison, trailer

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Worldwide outrage greeted events in Czechoslovakia in 1942, when the assassination of the country's chief Nazi commander, Reinhard Heydrich, was followed by the mass shooting of civilians to terrorise the population into betraying the perpetrator. In response, Fritz Lang and his fellow Austrian-German émigrés in Hollywood lost little time



Storage hunters: *Cry of the City*



THE WILD FRONTIER

Heroes are hard to find in a William Wellman western that's so dark it even has Henry Fonda in an unsympathetic role

THE OX-BOW INCIDENT

William Wellman; USA 1943; Arrow Academy/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; 75 minutes; Certificate PG; 1.37:1; Features: audio commentary by Dick Etulain and William Wellman Jr, introduction and selected scene commentaries by Peter Stanfield, 'Henry Fonda: Hollywood's Quiet Hero', stills gallery, trailer, booklet

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

With the coming of sound the western, hitherto a prolific staple of Hollywood production, went into something of an eclipse, being associated with cheaply made films that recycled characters, plots and stock footage and mostly played in small-town neighbourhood cinemas. The genre was largely abandoned to B-movies and the inanity of 'singing cowboys' like Gene Autry and Roy Rogers. Not until the end of the 1930s, with John Ford's *Stagecoach*, did the western regain critical and commercial respectability. A-list directors such as Michael Curtiz (*Dodge City*, 1939), Cecil B. DeMille (*Union Pacific*, 1939) and Fritz Lang (*The Return of Frank James*, 1940) soon jumped on the bandwagon.

But these films, though they featured conflict and death (as almost all westerns must), generally opted for an upbeat conclusion in the final reel. (Thomas Mitchell's Doc Boone, waving John Wayne and Claire Trevor off into the distance at the end of *Stagecoach*: "Well, they're saved from the blessings of civilisation.")

Into this climate of optimism and celebration of the frontier spirit William Wellman's *The Ox-Bow Incident* landed with the thud of a tossed hand-grenade. The ending was about as far from happy as could be got, with the frontier spirit skewered as a blend of bigotry, ignorance and brutality.

Wellman, a reliable contract director who occasionally took on more personal projects, had toted Walter Van Tilburg Clark's 1940 novel around Hollywood with little success before offering it to Darryl F. Zanuck at Fox. (According to his son, William Jr, in the commentary, this was the only time Wellman ever invested his own money in a project.) Though they'd previously worked together, the two men hadn't spoken for some two years after getting into a fistfight – despite which, Zanuck agreed to produce the movie. But given that the material patently lacked box-office appeal, he stipulated that it must be made as cheaply as possible.

So in 1943, *Ox-Bow* came as a shock to audiences in more ways than one. Its subject, the lynching of innocent men in 1885 Nevada, was calculated to disturb. And the look of the film, dictated by its restricted budget, was unexpected: rather than the wide-open spaces of the regular western, it was shot on studio sets



Mob rule: *The Ox-Bow Incident*

and at the Fox ranch, with only a single day of desert location shooting allowed. Not that this harms the film; the dark claustrophobic look enhances the sense of entrapment that affects all the characters – and not just the victims.

Equally unexpected, even today, is the treatment of Henry Fonda's character. A film about lynching, with Fonda in the lead; you'd expect him to play the voice of reason, arguing passionately for due legal process (as he was to do in 1957's *12 Angry Men*, a film much influenced by *Ox-Bow*). But no; that role goes to Harry Davenport as storekeeper Arthur Davies. In the opening scene, Fonda, playing wandering cowhand Gil Carter, is shown as an unpleasant drunk, knocking a man down for a trivial disagreement and stamping on him until the barman crowns him with a bottle. He and his companion (Harry Morgan) go along with the necktie party so as to avoid incurring suspicion themselves, and only reluctantly oppose the lynching. It's surely the least sympathetic of Fonda's early roles.

The pro-lynching constituency are a colourfully unsavoury bunch. Leader is William Eythe's phoney Confederate major, pompous in his uniform. He's backed by Marc Lawrence's

vindictive Jeff Farnley, a close friend of the supposedly murdered rancher; Paul Hurst's repellently clownish town drunk; and Jane Darwell's Ma Grier, set on proving herself more callous than any man. Their victims are a spirited Mexican (Anthony Quinn), a half-deranged old man (Francis Ford, John Ford's brother) and, in one of his finest roles, Dana Andrews as Donald Martin, a rancher who begs to be allowed to write a farewell letter to his wife.

These days, of course, to condemn lynching on the grounds that the victims might be innocent seems a lot less than adequate, and Lamar Trotti's script turns intolerably stilted and preachy before the end: Martin's farewell letter, as read out by Gil, sounds like a formal lesson in civics. Nevertheless, the film was a bold initiative, and still retains powerful emotional impact. Zanuck was right: *Ox-Bow* bombed at the box office. The critics were impressed, though, and it gradually attained the status of a classic.

Arrow's 4K restoration cherishes the dark, doomy tones of Arthur C. Miller's gleaming photography. Peter Stanfield's intro usefully positions the film as the forerunner of subsequent noir westerns like *Pursued* (1947) and *Blood on the Moon* (1948); and in their joint commentary, William Wellman Jr and American West historian Dick Etulain provide informative background. Oddly, though, Etulain maintains that, unlike in the novel, Eythe's character isn't got up as a Confederate officer. On this point, the evidence is visibly against him. 

The ending was about as far from happy as could be got, with the frontier spirit skewered as a blend of bigotry and brutality

Television

THE HOLLOW CROWN: THE WARS OF THE ROSES

Dominic Cooke/UK 2016; BBC/Universal/Region 2
DVD/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 481 mins/1.78:1
Extras: deleted scenes, 'Making of...' feature.

THE WARS OF THE ROSES

Peter Hall/UK 1965; BBC/Illuminations/all-region
DVD; 505 mins/1.33:1. Extra: 'Making of...' feature

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

Every so often Lord Reith spins in his grave and someone in an office at the BBC, feeling the tremors, decides to placate his vengeful ghost by doing some Shakespeare. But a sense of cultural obligation – not “We want to do this” but “Oh god, I suppose we ought to do this” – can sometimes murder the drama (exhibits A to Q: large chunks of the BBC's complete Shakespeare cycle of the late 70s and early 80s).

One thing to be said about this second series of *The Hollow Crown* is that it rarely seems overwhelmed by cultural obligation. That is partly a matter of the material. The first series collected together new productions of *Richard II*, *Henry IV Parts One and Two* and *Henry V* – plays packed with memorable speeches, comedy, pathos and patriotic lines (“This sceptre'd isle...”, “Cry God for England, Harry and Saint George”); just the stuff to give the troops as part of the 2012 cultural Olympiad. But the plays collected here – the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*, all from early in Shakespeare's career – include large quantities of semi-digested chronicles, with a profusion of battle scenes and violent deaths punctuated by longwinded speeches of defiance, accusations of treachery and vows of revenge... The *Henry* plays, in particular, are rarely presented without fairly heavy trimming and some judicious reordering of scenes, but Ben Power, the adapter here, slashes them about with more abandon than usual, to fit the four plays into three episodes. We lose most of the scenes of war in France that occupy much of *Henry VI Part One* – and along with them, most of Joan of Arc; *Part Two* eliminates all mention of Jack Cade's rebellion (“The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers”); and what we're left with is a drama of quarrelling dynasties, of personalities – it wasn't Shakespeare's idea to have Joan of Arc personally stab to death the English hero Lord Talbot (Philip Glenister, well cast in a macho role).

Many of Power's decisions are sensible, some are ingenious – for example, a post-battle soliloquy by King Henry lamenting the slaughter is moved forward to become his commentary as the battle takes place. Still, it often feels as though the drama is steered by anxiety about what the modern viewer will take: this is Shakespeare redone for the *Game of Thrones* generation. Hence, too, casting confined largely to faces already familiar from TV – not that this is necessarily a problem: Hugh Bonneville is excellent as the decent but outmanoeuvred Duke of Gloucester; and the highlight of the series is Benedict Cumberbatch's magnetic Richard III, writhingly deformed, sneering his asides confidently and gleefully to the camera.

Concessions to the modern world are inevitable (and the intertitles that clarify settings and passage of time can only be helpful). Still,



The Wars of the Roses The performances highlight a critical moment in British acting, when the classical theatre was giving way to kitchen-sink naturalism

some of the rewrites seem pointless or perverse: molehills become dunghills, blood issues from a neck rather than a bosom, and the moment in *Henry VI Part Three* when a father discovers that the battlefield corpse he is stripping is that of his son is here reversed, so that the son realises the body is his father. The sense of time out of joint – children predeceasing their parents – is lost, for no reason I can spot. The omission of Cade's revolt, in particular, flattens the plays tonally – you lose a current of lethal buffoonery, as well as the central point that Henry's weakness as a ruler allows a sense of grievance to fester and break out. One of the problems with revamping the classics to suit your own historical moment is that moments don't last very long: these plays were broadcast in May; a few weeks later, after the Brexit referendum, leaving out scenes of popular revolt against a self-involved elite looks like a mistake. (A *Henry VI* with the king played as David Cameron, failing to keep warring factions in check and losing his foothold in Europe, can't be far off.)

There are other problems: the omnipresent ominous music (which highlights fluctuations in the sound levels – not what you expect on a Blu-ray disc); rosy CGI burning ruins and over-filtered colour; and Tom Sturridge's gap year trustafarian Henry, an interpretation that is fine as far as it goes but short on nuance or development. Still, Dominic Cooke's production grew on me; and if it rarely thrills or sears, it keeps you watching.

By comparison, Peter Hall's RSC production of the same plays as *The Wars of the Roses*,

broadcast by the BBC in 1965, is not always easy to watch: Illumination's DVD edition suffers from low-contrast black-and-white film and fuzzy sound. But John Barton's deftly cut version is more faithful to the original; and filmed on set at Stratford (John Wyver's excellent essay gives technical details), it is more faithful to the plays' origins in the theatre – and a lot of Shakespeare's language makes far more sense in a theatrical context than transplanted into a notionally more realistic setting.

The real thrill of these discs, though, comes from watching a set of extraordinary performances from a critical moment in British acting, when the classical theatre exemplified by Olivier and Gielgud was giving way to kitchen-sink naturalism. Many of these actors would become familiar faces on TV later, but were here at the start of their careers – though this is a more traditional approach to Shakespeare than Cooke and Power's, the considerably younger cast gives it rather more freshness and energy. David Warner, barely out of drama school, is a brilliant Henry VI, callow to begin with but maturing over the course of the plays into ruthlessness, without gaining much in wisdom or strength; Janet Suzman doubles as a tough Joan of Arc and Richard III's wife Anne; and Ian Holm is as neurotically captivating as you'd expect as Richard III. To that you can add Peggy Ashcroft, lethal and heartrending as the elderly Queen Margaret; and a youngish Donald Sinden as a commanding Richard Plantagenet, before sitcom stardom reduced his public persona to a set of tics. Illuminations deserve some kind of medal. 

New releases

in turning out this tribute to the spirit of resistance, which was on US cinema screens within a year. Still, even though the film is a one-time-only collaboration between three cultural heavyweights – Lang, playwright Bertolt Brecht and composer Hanns Eisler – it's never quite been regarded as a top-echelon effort, perhaps marked down by its wartime morale-boosting imperatives.

This terrific disc shows that received opinion doesn't really do justice to the complexity on offer. The film casts American actors as heroic Czech citizens to allow US audiences a taste of life under occupation, but also lays out a much more nuanced and ambiguous take on the wherefores of sacrificing hundreds of lives to save the single patriot who pulled the trigger.

It was shot with at times thrilling economy, brilliantly insinuating Nazi brutality while keeping most actual carnage off screen, and it's hard not to see the result as a flipside to *M* (1931), delineating the climate of fear inside a city in lockdown, where everyday routine becomes fraught with paranoia, and the battle for survival sees ordinary folk venturing beyond their moral comfort zone (like the criminal community closing in on Peter Lorre in the earlier masterpiece).

If Lang's beady-eyed view of history as a theatrical conflict between rival sets of untruths hasn't dated at all, it's still hard to come to terms with Brian Donlevy's seemingly tranquillised turn as the fugitive Czech shooter. That could possibly be a remnant of Brecht's insistence on collective primacy rather than individual resistance, yet overall Lang's instincts in delivering a suspense thriller that would entertain its way into shaping public opinion certainly do come good in a movie clearly deserving a higher ranking in his canon.

Disc: The 2k transfer by Pinewood Studios from materials held in the BFI National Archive has restored crucial levels of contrast to James Wong Howe's proto-*noir* camerawork, while the commentary by Columbia University's Richard Peña proves especially illuminating on the creative frictions that led to a cooling of relations between Lang and Brecht. An additional half-hour doc fills in the historical background, completing a valuable overall package that's essentially a UK reissue of Cohen Media's Region A US release.

HORACE & PETE

(The series is available as a 1080p HD stream or download exclusively from www.louisck.net. The full series is \$31 and individual episodes are \$2-5).

Reviewed by Craig Williams

Louis CK's outstanding new web series *Horace & Pete* is unlike any other show in the so-called Golden Age of Television, with the traditional strictures of the medium – from the predominance of plot to rigid episode formats – dispensed with in service of the comedian's unique auteurist vision. Owing as much to cinematic and theatrical traditions as it does to television, it is a unique convergence of forms, which will stand as CK's masterpiece.

Entirely self-funded and distributed through his website, it stars CK himself alongside Steve Buscemi, Alan Alda and Edie Falco, and tells the story of a rundown Brooklyn bar that



Hard cell: Widmark and Mature in *Kiss of Death*

has been owned by the same family since 1916, always with a Horace and Pete at the helm, and is now run by Horace Wittel VIII (CK) and his cousin Pete Wittel (Buscemi).

The opening moments, in which the locals slowly gather at the bar and engage in prickly discourse buoyed by familiarity, evoke a classical sitcom set-up, but the elongated silences that punctuate the chatter – almost Brechtian in the way they break the rhythms of conversation – are where *Horace & Pete* gathers its poetic force. Like the work of playwright Annie Baker (who is thanked in the credits), the show finds a degree of tragedy in the quotidian, with CK's emphasis on space and tone placing the material in a distinctly theatrical register. In this sense, it often feels like a television play in the tradition of the BBC's *Play for Today* or, in the outstanding *pas de deux* episode between CK and Laurie Metcalf, Alun Owen's snapshots of spousal angst in the pioneering *Half Hour Story* from the early days of ITV.

The notion of inheritance is at the heart of *Horace & Pete*. The bar itself is a bitter legacy, with each successive owner defined by the sins of his father and damned to repeat his mistakes. The idea of artistic inheritance is equally significant; from Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* to the sitcom *Cheers*, CK grapples with a century of American art built on the quasi-mythical image of the city bar-room as a kind of urban utopia – a solace from the grind of life – and he reflects on what that trajectory means in 2016.

CK's stand-up may cover similar territory – from generational disappointment to male hopelessness – but *Horace & Pete* represents the darker, more fatalistic flipside. For CK, it's history repeating itself first as farce, second as tragedy.

THE IMMORTAL STORY

Orson Welles; France 1968; Criterion/Region A/V1 Blu-ray/DVD; 58 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: audio commentary by critic Adrian Martin, 1968 French TV documentary portrait of Orson Welles by Frédéric Rossif and François Reichenbach, three new interviews, essay by Jonathan Rosenbaum

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Arguably cinema's greatest arch-expressionist, Orson Welles loved movies for their simulacra and prevarication, and as his career meandered through its famous difficulties, he more freely embraced the illusory essence of the medium. *F for Fake* (1975) may be the definitive manifesto of Welles's ardour for cinema's dishonesty, but almost all his films (even 1948's *Macbeth*) are structured around the gap between appearance

and reality. Not knowing something for certain, even as you were looking at it (or its reflection, or reflections), was always his most poignant verity and his savviest statement about cinema.

A cheap French TV project he shot largely in his own villa outside Madrid, *The Immortal Story* compounds this idea by way of a story by Karen Blixen (writing as Isak Dinesen), using only four characters and a bargeload of conjurers' chutzpah.

Welles (in theatrical greasepaint that evokes, of all things, the get-up of the 19-year-old Welles in *The Hearts of Age*, 34 years earlier) plays a dying nabob in Macao who enlists his accountant (Roger Coggio) to recreate, and therein disempower, a well-circulated story: about a rich man who hires a sailor to impregnate his wife. As the wife, the accountant hires a local courtesan (Jeanne Moreau), and as the naive sailor, a homeless teen (Norman Eshley). For Welles, this is virtually autobiography – orchestrating this simple fictional movie-within-a-movie is met with all kinds of recalcitrance and whimsical instability, and human vagaries make a mess out of the 'director's' intentions. Through this tale, Welles clearly saw his own hobbled career (orchestrating fictions we're not supposed to 'believe') as a kind of existential condition. But more than that, the textures of the film's diegesis suggest a baser layer of deception: Welles's makeup and dubbing, Moreau's casting (she hardly gets to be very Moreau-esque), Eshley's lumpy blandness, the transparently Spanish villages – all of it is as fake and as gestural as a card trick.

Welles reportedly wanted to make a Dinesen omnibus, but the other stories surely wouldn't have allowed him to sum up as concisely his bittersweet attitude toward the artform.

Disc: Typically lovely 4K digital spruce-up.

The generous supplements are a little repetitive; Adrian Martin's commentary exhausts the film, and Jonathan Rosenbaum's characteristically self-involved essay is heavy on production details and light on interpretation.

KISS OF DEATH

Henry Hathaway; USA 1947; Signal One/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 99 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: commentary, Richard Widmark interview, trailer

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Seldom has a mere supporting actor (and a screen debutant at that) so comprehensively waltzed off with an entire film. Without Richard Widmark's input, *Kiss of Death* would be a fairly ho-hum parable about Nick Bianco (Victor Mature), an essentially good man turned to crime by force of circumstance but attempting moral rehabilitation by coming to an arrangement with the local assistant DA (Brian Donlevy), with cute (if archly overacted) children and an old flame (Coleen Gray) thrown into the mix.

But as soon as Widmark's Tommy Udo appears (gratifyingly early, and regularly thereafter), the film goes off in a far more intriguing direction. A slickly sharp-suited spiv whose involuntary giggle seems to incorporate a preliminary baring of fangs, this particular thief has no honour about him (Udo was one of the earliest and most striking examples of a chilling amorality in post-war American thrillers), and the psychological games he plays with Bianco

New releases

are just as queasily gripping as the film's most notorious set piece involving a disabled woman, a wheelchair and a vertiginous flight of stairs. As Udo disingenuously puts it with a faux-matey grin, why should he be angry with Bianco for giving evidence against him when it failed to secure a conviction? But with Udo's already established reputation for literally getting away with murder, it's little wonder that Bianco is not exactly inclined to take this at face value.

Film noir is generally associated with heightened studio interiors – hence the opening credits here taking the trouble to highlight that *Kiss of Death* was shot entirely on location, mostly in New York City. While there's less of a consciously documentary feel here than there is in Jules Dassin's *The Naked City*, made the following year, there's plenty of historical interest, not least in the art deco stylings of both the Chrysler Building (location of the opening robbery) and the Manhattan House of Detention.

Disc: Well-transferred *film noir* always scrubs up nicely in high definition, and this disc is no exception. Equally happily, it combines the two extras featured separately on previous editions: the excellent critical commentary by Alain Silver and James Ursini from the 2005 Fox DVD (Region 1) and the NFT interview with Richard Widmark from the 2007 BFI edition. As is often the way with non-film-specific archive pieces, Widmark has little to say about *Kiss of Death* but tells some delicious stories about John Ford and Otto Preminger.

SUTURE

David Siegel and Scott McGehee; USA 1993; Arrow Video/

All-region Blu-ray and NTSC DVD; 95 minutes; 2.35:1;

Features: audio commentary by directors and producer Steven Soderbergh, deleted scenes, new making-of documentary, the directors' early short 'Birds Past', trailers

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Possibly the most self-conscious and postmodern-theory-drenched neo-*noir* ever made, David Siegel and Scott McGehee's debut feature came at the crest of the Soderbergh/Van Sant/Linklater/Tarantino/Sundance 'dependie' wave, and was perhaps a bit too hyper-ironic and over-aestheticised to make much of a splash. It's spectacularly mannered in both its execution and its concept, and so can be as off-putting as it is fascinating, depending on your appetites and/or tolerances.

The story is not unfamiliar: two half-brothers meet after their wealthy father has died, and discover that they're identical; one stages his own death by planting a bomb in his half-brother's car (after switching IDs etc). The victim survives but is amnesiac, and is subsequently re-educated as the first brother, into a life he'd never known.

The daring trump card from the outset is the casting: one brother (Dennis Haysbert) is black, the other (Michael Harris) is white, and nobody in the film's universe sees the difference. (The plastic surgery that Haysbert's patsy receives is, we're told, modelled on Harris's photos, but there is no change when the bandages come off.) This imbues every scene with a fiercely odd subtextual charge that can be read any number of ways – is the film about racism, or, perhaps more aptly, does it use race as a signifier for identity



Patch work: Dennis Haysbert in *Suture*

crises and class inequalities in general? You could argue just as easily that, since most of the plot resists social engagement, instead hewing exclusively to the patient's slow, medically assisted attempts to recover an identity that isn't his, it doesn't mean much at all. Or is it about black Americans striving to 'be white', even though in Siegel and McGehee's diegesis there's no difference between one or the other?

Shot in pearly widescreen black-and-white (reminiscent of the 1960s Japanese New Wavers, particularly Teshigahara Hiroshi's *The Face of Another*), *Suture* may in retrospect be the definitive Obamaland movie – an idealised vision of a race-blind world nevertheless fraught with spite, violence and lostness.

Disc: Lovely to look at, with chatty supplementary features that exhaustively delineate the directors' journey but, perhaps wisely, leave explication of the film to the viewer.

LEE TRACY RKO 4-FILM COLLECTION

CRIMINAL LAWYER/BEHIND THE HEADLINES/CRASHING HOLLYWOOD/FIXER DUGAN

Christy Cabanne/Richard Rosson/Lew Landers/Lew Landers; USA 1937/37/38/39; Warner Archive/Region 1 DVD NTSC; 72/58/61/68 minutes; 1.33:1

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

At the same time the unlikeliest of 1930s B-movie leading men and one of the decade's most entertaining blabbermouths, Lee Tracy has by now attained legendary status, epitomising as he does his era's very un-21st-century appetite for Gatling-gun dialogue and cynical personality.

A rubber-faced squirt of a man, Tracy personified the American Huckster, with an untrusting squint and his tirelessly jibe-spouting mouth always set at a wiseass angle. A Tracy plot was always structured around the man's ability to talk his way out of anything. (Almost anything: famously and maybe apocryphally, his career began a slow descent when, during the making of *Viva Villa!* in 1933, he drunkenly peed from his Mexican hotel balcony on to the heads of military cadets.)

Most of his 20-odd vehicles from the 1930s are still waiting in the archives. The four in this set, perhaps regrettably, all come from late in the decade, when Tracy's stature kept him in the RKO line-up rather than at Paramount or MGM, with the accompanying decline in scripts and budgets.

In *Criminal Lawyer*, he's a whiz attorney-turned-DA with woman problems, a bottle habit (which doesn't stop him drunkenly sweet-talking

a night-court judge after a speakeasy is busted) and old ties to a crazy gangster. Meanwhile in *Behind the Headlines* he's a snoopy reporter acing out the competition – for whom his girlfriend writes – until she's kidnapped.

Fixer Dugan is a good deal more inventive – here Tracy is the motormouth manager 'fixer' of a travelling circus who, after his high-wire lover is killed, gets saddled with her circus-born 11-year-old daughter (Virginia Weidler). But he is overshadowed by the densely inhabited old-school circus milieu, with its details about fairway grifters, unruly megafauna, the essential extra-legal nature of the enterprise and so on.

Crashing Hollywood may be the set's springiest concoction, a hilarious Tinseltown echo-chamber (so popular before the war), with Tracy as a screenwriter who, knowing nothing about crime, collaborates with a reluctant ex-con, the latter lifting heist details straight from real robberies and bringing his old gangster buddies out of the woodwork. The supporting cast give Tracy plenty of competition – Richard Lane, as a fearless studio producer, eats every scene he's in, and Bradley Page is deft as both an icy gangster and the fey actor playing him in the movie-within-the-movie. And the script is clever enough to beg for a remake.

Disc: Fine archival prints, as per usual.

THE WORLD OF KANAKO

Nakashima Tetsuya; Japan 2014; Metrodome/Region 2 DVD; 118 minutes; Certificate 18; 2.39:1

Reviewed by Jasper Sharp

The latest by Nakashima Tetsuya (*Kamikaze Girls*, *Memories of Matsuko*) goes even further than his acclaimed 2010 drama *Confessions* in its spiralling descent into darkness and depravity, with a convoluted plot that riffs on Paul Schrader's *Hardcore* (1979), Kitano Takeshi's *Violent Cop* (1989) and Park Chan-wook's *Old Boy* (2003), as Yakusho Koji's substance-addled brutish ex-cop goes in search of his missing high-schooler daughter and is drawn into a lawless demi-monde of disaffected smack-addicted teens and violent dealers from which few get out alive.

As with the director's previous work, this is handled with a breathless technical virtuosity bordering on glibness that sits at odds with the squalid milieu. The action proceeds at a hysterical pace, but the relentlessly frenetic intercutting between different timeframes within scenes, though exhilarating at first, will leave many flagging by the midpoint, as will the blink-and-miss-them plot revelations. The undeniably beautiful images of cinematographer Ato Shioichi are rarely given a chance to register beneath the bombast, and the graphic scenes of classroom bullying, rape and mutilation will prove too rich for some blood, though Asian Extreme-ophiles will delight in the sheer verve of it all.

Disc: Metrodome's Region 2 DVD-only UK release is barebones compared with Drafthouse's Region A Blu-ray released earlier this year (which includes a making-of featurette and interviews with lead actress Komatsu Nana and author of the source novel Fukumachi Akio), with extras limited to trailers of forthcoming releases and the choice between 2.0 stereo or 5.1 Dolby Digital audio.

GIVE US THIS DAY

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

This near-*noir* drama of working-class life hints at the kind of career Edward Dmytryk might have had if he'd remained in exile in Britain

By Fintan McDonagh

At the beginning of 1948, Edward Dmytryk found himself in the contradictory position of being one of the most fêted directors in Hollywood – his film *noir* *Crossfire* having just garnered five Oscar nominations including Best Picture and Best Director – and of being unemployable. His brief membership of the Communist Party had ended in disillusionment but had nevertheless led to him being hauled before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) hearings on Hollywood in October 1947. His refusal to answer questions, along with nine other Party members, had him condemned as an unfriendly witness and suspended by his studio RKO.

As the only member of the Hollywood Ten who was a director, a position on the film set that by its nature is highly visible, Dmytryk could not attempt pseudonymous work like that pursued by blacklisted screenwriters. His temporary saviour was Rod Geiger, an American soldier who had fallen in with Roberto Rossellini while serving in Italy and who had been instrumental in the making of *Rome Open City* (1945) and *Paisan* (1946). Geiger set up a deal for a new film with a British producer, Nat Bronstein, and in the spring of 1948 Dmytryk crossed the Atlantic to try to salvage his career.

Geiger's project for Dmytryk was an adaptation of a socially engaged semi-autobiographical novel by Pietro di Donato, *Christ in Concrete*, to which Rossellini and Luchino Visconti had previously been attached as director and producer respectively. The film would eventually be released in Britain as *Give Us This Day*, the word 'Christ' proving unacceptable to the censors. It became a vehicle for several other refugees from the blacklist: Sam Wanamaker, just prior to his permanent relocation to England, played the central character Geremio, and the script was written by Ben Barzman, who had worked with Dmytryk on the 1945 John Wayne vehicle *Back to Bataan*. With J. Arthur Rank's financial backing, Dmytryk was able to construct a vision of New York at Denham Studios so rich in convincing detail that the artifice is only momentarily ruptured for the British viewer by the appearance of such stalwart character actors as Sid James and Rosalie Crutchley.

Give Us This Day is a lament for the proletariat that occupies the sparsely populated terrain at the intersection between social realism and *film noir*. Geremio struggles through ill-paid construction jobs during the 1920s, while his Italian wife yearns for their own home, a dream that recedes further with each child she bears. The film confronts the moral dilemmas and agonising self-



Trouble and strife: Lea Padovani and Sam Wanamaker in *Give Us This Day*

It is a lament for the proletariat that occupies the sparsely populated intersection between social realism and film noir

doubt familiar in the *noir* universe, but the mean streets of this metropolis are filled with decent Italian-American construction workers trying to survive hard times, and the bad guys are their mostly unseen bosses. Barzman, released from the shackles of the studio system, sometimes overdoes the florid dialogue, but Dmytryk exerts a firm grip throughout, energised by a story that echoed his reservations about capitalism. As he wrote in his autobiography: "All of us believed in the film so much that it was almost a crusade."

The opening sequence, depicting Geremio lurching between his mistress and his wife, exhibits an atmospheric potency that is the equal of the more celebrated sequences Dmytryk had created in *films noirs* at RKO such as *Murder, My Sweet* (1944) and *Cornered* (1945). The subsequent use of a lengthy flashback to show the character flaws and betrayals that have brought our hero to this dark night of the soul carries familiar fatalistic overtones.

Cinematographer C.M. Pennington-Richards creates moral universes with his lighting – the dutiful wife (an impassioned performance from Lea Padovani) is starkly illuminated by a single lightbulb, while her more compromised husband lingers in the shadows. The climax of the film is shockingly bleak. Underscored by religious imagery that riled the Catholic church, the working man is abandoned by an unseeing God and an uncaring capitalist system.

Give Us This Day is an accomplished and vital piece of work that was frustrated in its attempt to find an American audience. Despite winning an award at the Venice Film Festival and enjoying the support of its producers (Dmytryk recounted that Rank was in tears at the film's first screening), pressure from the Legion of Decency ensured a merely minimal release. The ploy of renaming the film *Salt to the Devil* failed to fool the boycotters and it rapidly vanished from cinemas.

Returning to America, Dmytryk served time in prison for contempt of Congress, and only regained his Hollywood career after testifying before HUAC. After its initial theatrical release, the rights to *Give Us This Day* reverted to the novelist di Donato. For decades, Italian television viewers were the only audience for this glimpse at the alternative career Edward Dmytryk might have enjoyed had he taken the Joseph Losey route and chosen exile in Britain. **S**

WHAT THE PAPERS SAID



'The film develops slowly, gaining power in its second half. A remarkable achievement is the New York setting, done almost entirely by back-projection, since the film was made in England: once or twice one wishes the atmosphere could be developed, but the emphasis is primarily on character and it is a measure of Dmytryk's success that he sustains this emphasis. Notable, too, are Vetchinsky's designs, which capture the distinctively drab Italian interiors'

'Monthly Film Bulletin', 31 October 1949

TRUE STORIES



I am legend: James Dean shares with Marilyn Monroe a live-fast-die-young iconography that eclipses any level-headed attempt at biography

THE REAL JAMES DEAN

**Intimate Memories from
Those Who Knew Him Best**

Edited by Peter Winkler, Chicago Review Press.
368pp, \$19.99, ISBN 9781613734728

Reviewed by Christina Newland

If all of the collected 'intimate memories' of James Dean share one factor, it seems to be that he never looked very impressive in real life. To most of the people he came across – be they friends, lovers or colleagues – he appeared unimposing. The sandy-haired, slouching kid hid behind thick-framed glasses, perennially clothed in the same grey slacks and shabby blue jacket.

But beneath those glasses were the piercing blue eyes of a matinee idol in the making.

The newest addition to the volumes of lore on Dean comes from journalist Peter Winkler, who has done an excellent job at selecting excerpts from various hard-to-find memoirs and essays, tracking down first-hand accounts and impressions of the rising young actor. Included in the selections are personal memories from his *Rebel Without a Cause* co-star Natalie Wood, directors Elia Kazan and George Stevens, as well as ex-girlfriends and boyfriends, casual acquaintances and schoolteachers. In collating them, it attempts to answer the question that any eager fan yearns to know: what was he really like?

The answer seems as varied as the people doing the reminiscing, but this is the sketch I've mentally compiled: a genuine oddball, Dean was

often childishly ill-mannered, prone to abrupt changes in mood. A farm boy turned chameleonic beatnik, he became an intellectual copycat, devouring everything in small doses from philosophy to children's books. His put-on charm usually made up for the gaps in his knowledge. He could be arrogant and ambitious to a fault, using and discarding people when convenient. Yet his Indiana roots gave him a love of animals and fresh air, as well as a deep streak of family loyalty to the aunt and uncle who had raised him.

Perhaps the most shocking revelation of the book comes from Elizabeth Taylor, a great friend of James Dean's

Dean shares with Marilyn Monroe a live-fast-die-young iconography that eclipses any level-headed attempt at biography. There are too many layers of myth-making, romanticising and posthumous psychoanalysis. *The Real James Dean*, contrary to its title, can't truly overcome 60-odd years of rumour and anecdote. So it merely peels back those layers, fact-checking stories against one another and pointing out discrepancies in the footnotes. The reader is left to determine what certain factual errors might mean – is it embellishment or forgetfulness, a small mistake or an undermining lie?

Winkler juxtaposes the romantic with the scathing, never too fond of Dean to hide his faults. Most of the memories tend to share basic assumptions, others are wildly conflicting and sensational. Did Dean's obsession with bullfighting – and car racing – suggest a fascination with danger and death? Yes, probably. Numerous people recounted his unusually morbid streak. Did it mean he was a sado-masochist with violent sexual predilections? That seems less likely. The memories of his one-time friend, the writer John Gilmore, in particular, seem to borrow more from the lurid mind of Hollywood sleaze chronicler Kenneth Anger than any lived reality.

Winkler's book is like a jigsaw puzzle – not so much the 'real' James Dean as a composite account of him, where the reader is welcome to assemble their vision based on who and what they believe. Was Dean genuinely attracted to men? Or simply a hungry young actor who understood the value of the casting couch? Was he a wounded man-child in need of mothering, or a cynical user who could "go through people like underwear"? One account, from journalist pal Joe Hyams, says that Dean was keenly aware of his power with the opposite sex. "All women want to mother you," Dean claimed. His most reliable flirting technique? Putting his head in a woman's lap and letting her cuddle him.

The essential unknowability of any individual – particularly a troubled one whose life was cut short at 24 and then relentlessly mythologised – is at the heart of all this conjecture.

Perhaps the most shocking revelation of the book – assuming you take her at her word – comes from Elizabeth Taylor, a great friend of Dean's who shared a secret in an interview that she refused to allow to go public until her death. She claimed that during a late-night conversation, Dean had revealed to her that he had been sexually abused by his pastor back in Fairmount, Indiana, at the age of 11. In light of this, one is forced to reconsider Dean's performance at the centre of a religious family in *East of Eden* – a vulnerable young man twisted by pain.

Dean obsessives will forever be fascinated with books like these – yearning to know more about the way he held his cigarettes, what he might have ordered at Googie's diner, or the deeper, more intractable secrets of his short life. Winkler has offered a fine, well-researched attempt to parse together the 'real' James Dean – and no matter how precarious that reality may be, it's about as close as we'll probably ever get. 📖

THE 2001 FILE

Harry Lange and the Design of the Landmark Science Fiction Film

By Christopher Frayling, Reel Art Press, 336pp, £45, ISBN 9780957261020

By Isabel Stevens

Would our love for Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* be diminished if the lunar rocket bus that transports astronauts to the monolith had wheels or even long legs with circular feet, instead of the compact, sturdy landing-legs of the final design? It glides across the screen in close-up for only a few seconds so you might think not, but Kubrick worried a lot about details like these. "Too much like a household appliance," he scribbled on an early bus design by Harry Lange, a Nasa illustrator the director had enlisted to make his space fantasy as authentic as possible. Or what about the famous monolith? What if it had been a large transparent cube with images projected on to it, as Kubrick had envisioned early on, or any of the irregular geometric sculptures that Lange fashioned afterward? What does the sleek black tombstone give the film? A stark, piercing eeriness and a simplicity that none of these other concepts possess.

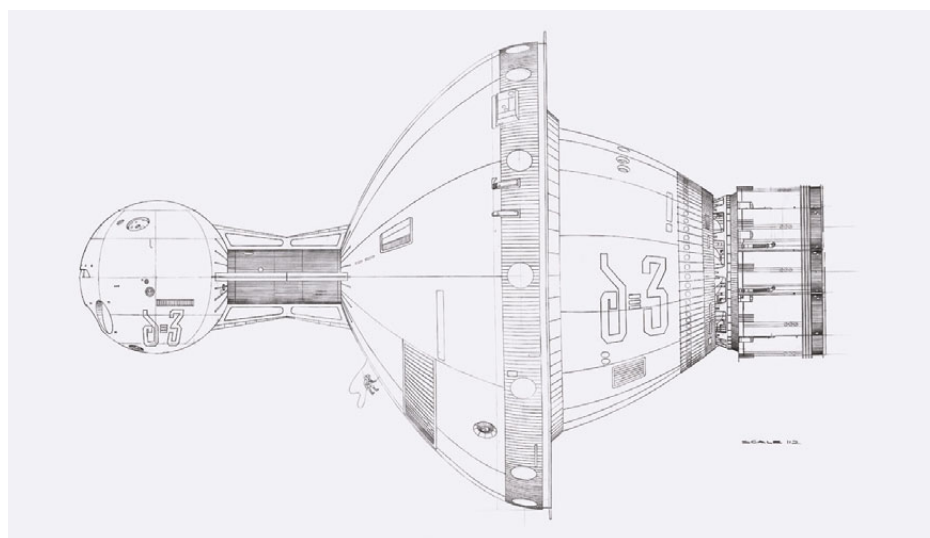
Kubrick knew that design matters. Here, in Christopher Frayling's selected highlights from Lange's archive, is the visual proof: pages and pages of sketches of alternative *2001* realities to get lost in, and sometimes to ask, "What if?" What's particularly revealing is that little design detail was specified in either Arthur C. Clarke's novel, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which was written alongside the screenplay, or in the final script itself. Kubrick, devourer of scientific fact, would

Harry Lange's drawings for the film are so elaborate they could be mistaken for blueprints of actual spaceships

never have found Clarke's description of "a small bus with an extension-tube like a stubby elephant trunk... now nuzzling affectionately up against a spacecraft" satisfactory to reproduce on film. Throughout, we can see the impact that Lange's imagination and detailed futuristic research had on the film (65 companies from IBM to Nasa contributed advice). His drawings for the film are so elaborate they could be mistaken for blueprints of actual spaceships. The designs for the Discovery craft reveal heat radiation panels, life-support blocks, fuel storage tanks and a realistic propulsion system. The Discovery evolved from a saucer-like design to a circular one, then a cylindrical one, until finally Lange arrived at the striking long skeletal craft that takes up the entire widescreen. Lange's varied visions for the ship's communication aerals are particularly beautiful – printed on black paper, his slivery graphite lines look like the sketches of an abstract artist.

There are delightful anecdotes aplenty about Kubrick's pedantic, tyrannical behaviour: showing how, for example, he got an army of designers to work on ideas he didn't want, simply to make sure he didn't want them. But the level of detail on show in every frame in *2001* testifies as to why this feat of filmmaking still feels futuristic a decade and a half after the year it was set. And it raises the question of whether such a grand celestial film experiment will ever be repeated on this scale. Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar*, despite Nathan Crowley's thoughtful and non-CGI reliant production design, rather pales in comparison.

The Lange archive also provides some consolation for fans in the UK, which often feels like the only country in the world not to get the Stanley Kubrick exhibition that has been touring museums and cinematheques since 2004 – despite the director's archive being based in London. And it fills something of a vacuum in books on film design. While there are many lavish Taschen tomes demonstrating the mastery of Kubrick, *The 2001 File* illustrates that even with a prodigious polymath auteur like Kubrick in charge, cinema is a collective creative endeavour. 📖



Lost in space: one of Harry Lange's early concept designs for the Discovery spacecraft

THE MAN FROM THE THIRD ROW

Hasse Ekman, Swedish Cinema, and the Long Shadow of Ingmar Bergman

By Fredrik Gustafsson; Berghahn Books; 176pp; hardback, £75, ISBN 9781785332500; paperback, £15.50, ISBN 9781785332869

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

If ever you feel you've plumbed the very depths of cinema and run out of 'lost masterpieces', it'd be worth your while to do a little research into Hasse Ekman. This is more easily suggested than done, unfortunately, because even in a day when we worship the myth of total – and free – easy access, English-translated versions of Ekman's films are under-represented on home video – though in the autumn of 2015, audiences at New York City's Museum of Modern Art were treated to a partial retrospective of films by the Swedish director, whose best working years came during the years of World War II and approximately a decade afterwards.

The MoMA retro was programmed by Fredrik Gustafsson, an archivist at the Swedish Film Institute, who it can safely be said has done a lot of research into Ekman – and the results of that digging are now available in a slim volume from academic press Berghahn. While written in the style of a thesis, with customary "In this chapter..." intros, Gustafsson never descends too deeply into academese, and his analysis of Ekman is positioned along good old-fashioned auteurist lines, specifically categorising Ekman as an "internal auteur" – in the author's words, "somebody who, besides making the films, has a strong presence in them, either personally and/or through a voiceover and/or by including strong autobiographical elements in the film."



Domestic violence: Eva Henning, the director's then-wife, in Hasse Ekman's *The Banquet* (1948)

Ekman was the son of screen star Gösta Ekman, with whom he co-starred in *Intermezzo* (1936), and he would appear in his own films and those of others, including erstwhile rival Ingmar Bergman's *Prison* (1949), which Ekman seemed to parody in his *The Girl from the Third Row* later that same year. For a time Ekman vied for the title of Sweden's most internationally lauded filmmaker, running off a string of excellent, formally assured films balancing the comic and dramatic, including *The Banquet* (1948), in which he and then-wife Eva Henning create a scalding domestic hell; and *Girl with Hyacinths* (1950), a suicide-mystery with a *Citizen Kane*-style investigation/flashback structure and a controversial (but wholly unhysterical) same-sex twist. He retired to Spain at the age of 50 after a quarter-century of frantic creative activity, leaving behind a thematically cogent body of work. His abiding themes are identified by Gustafsson as the allure of theatrical shape-shifting as a delivery

from middle-class conformity and the coddling of the Swedish state's *folkhemmet* – something explained in an early chapter which outlines the social context of Sweden in the years before and after Ekman arrived on the scene, and also offers a crash-course in the Swedish studio system during the 1930s and 1940s, an era that has traditionally been unfairly maligned by critics.

The Ekman amateur has the whole syllabus here. As an Ekman partisan who's seen everything I could get my hands on after a revelatory viewing of *Girl with Hyacinths* some years back, I was left eager to see more. For instance, his 1951 *House of Madness* (aka *The Nuthouse*), produced during a film industry strike, which was made by editing together pieces of previous films, introduced by a prologue in which fragments of a film by "the master" Hasse Ekman have been unearthed in the year 2248. If nothing else, then, it would appear that the rediscovery is proceeding slightly ahead of schedule. **S**

IN SEARCH OF LOST FILMS

By Phil Hall, BearManor Media, 206pp, \$19.95, ISBN 9781593939380

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

We rarely see books about lost symphonies no one has ever heard, or long-out-of-print novels that have vanished without trace, but because movies are the plasticised record of time and visual experience, their disappearance drives us bonkers. It took a while – seven decades or so – for us to realise what we were losing by not archiving properly, but the blame does not rest wholly with mercenary studio practices or corporate neglect. As this slim book makes clear, circumstances made the loss or disintegration of films almost inevitable: the nitrate stock itself was a fire hazard, briskly destroying itself en masse in one storage inferno after another. The evolution of the artform played a part: with the coming of talkies, late-20s silents were deemed forever unmarketable and often trashed, or at best badly neglected; by the early 30s the first talkies of a few years earlier were re-assessed as being too lousy or primitive to rewatch, and so disappeared into the void of history.

Hall, a longtime American journalist, publicist and programmer, is not quite making a study here of the non-state of the art. Instead it's as though he's trotting through a lecture without

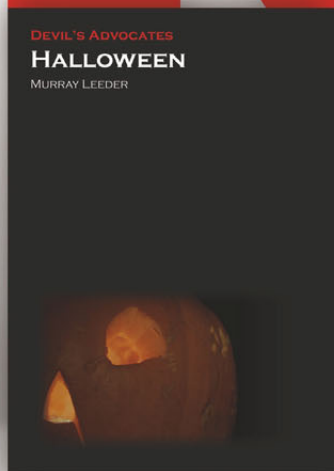


the slides, offering thumbnail sketches of films and filmmakers we know only a little about and, often, have never seen – from the 100-minute film of the 1897 Corbett-Fitzsimmons boxing match (the first feature-length anything), to

orphan footage cut from *Dr. Strangelove* (1963) and *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever* (1970). Particularly famous and seductive lost films, such as the Marx Brothers' *Humorisk* (1920), Oscar Micheaux's *The Betrayal* (1948) and the oeuvre of Chinese-American director Esther Eng are evoked in just a few paragraphs each. There's only so much that can be said; Hall's facile analysis is dependent on rumour and old newspaper reporting, and the less of that there is, the more tantalisingly lost the film in question seems.

Fascinating historical angles do appear – how the early disc system for talkies often survives the films themselves, how too many 'first' films in developing countries vanish thanks to industrial innocence, how projectionists were often responsible for cutting up films and trashing the footage and for hoarding prints that years later would be found in a closet or attic. The unpalatable reality remains that for the first half-century or so, the world's movie industries viewed their product as ephemeral and essentially disposable. The sea change arrived with the rise of film culture and New Wave-ism in the 60s, which was when archiving got serious – predominantly in New York, Washington, London and Paris – and went from merely collecting prints to preserving and restoring them. The sub-industry boils today, even if what's genuinely lost is lost forever, and, as Serge Bromberg from Lobster Films is quoted as saying *vis-à-vis* the act of restoration, "You cannot turn back a hamburger into a cow." **S**

Read

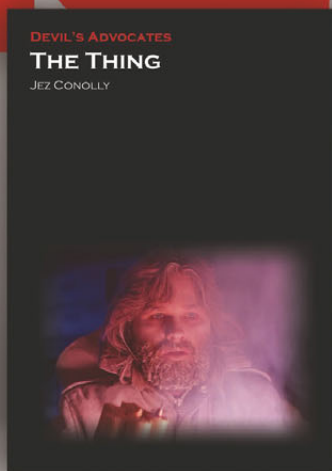


HALLOWEEN

By Murray Leeder, Auteur, 112pp, paperback, illustrated, £9.99, ISBN 9781906733797
 "Well researched, engagingly written and informative, it is destined to become an invaluable resource for horror scholars and fans alike." (Richard Nowell, author of *Blood Money*, 2011)

John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978) enjoys the status of October's equivalent to *It's a Wonderful Life*. Murray Leeder offers a bold and provocative study of this paradigm of low-budget ingenuity, often regarded as the progenitor of the slasher film, which struck a chord with audiences. He explores *Halloween* as an unexpected ghost film, and examines such subjects as its construction of the teenager, the relationship of *Halloween* the film to Halloween the holiday, and Michael Myers's brand of pure evil. It is a fascinating read for scholars and fans alike.

www.facebook.com/DevilsAdvocatebooks

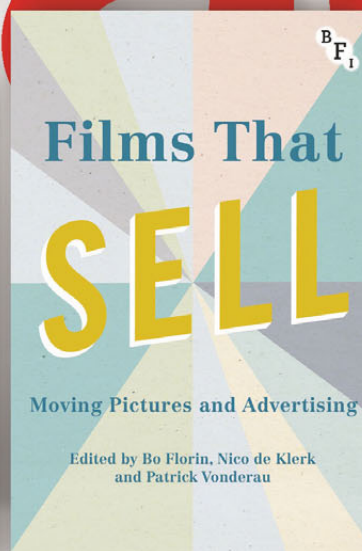


THE THING

By Jez Conolly, Auteur, 110pp, paperback, illustrated, £9.99, ISBN 9781906733773
 "... an excellent study... well researched, informative... and intelligently written in a clear, presentable style." (*Exquisite Terror*)

Consigned to the deep freeze of critical and commercial reception on release, *The Thing* bounced back to become one of the most highly regarded horror films of the 1980s. More than 30 years on, Jez Conolly looks back to its antecedents and forward to the changing nature of its reception and the work it has influenced. Themes discussed include the significance of *The Thing*'s subversive antipodal environment, the role that the film has played in the corruption of the onscreen monstrous form, the qualities that make it an exemplar of John Carpenter's work and the continued relevance of its legendary visual effects.

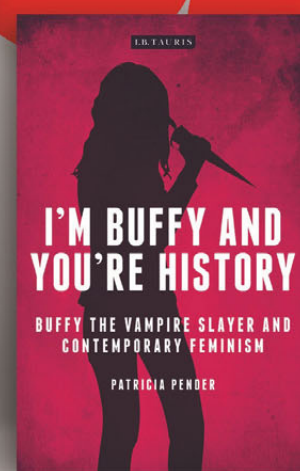
www.facebook.com/DevilsAdvocatebooks



FILMS THAT SELL

Moving Pictures and Advertising

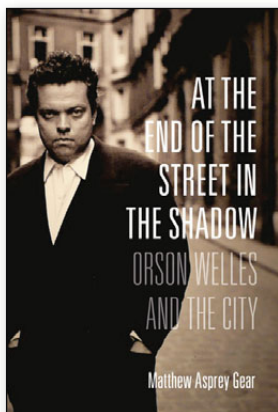
Edited by Patrick Vonderau, Bo Florin, Nico De Klerk, Palgrave/BFI Publishing, 336pp, paperback, £24.99, ISBN 9781844578917
 While moving image advertising has been around us, everywhere, for at least a century, the topic has tended to be overlooked by cinema studies. This far-reaching new collection makes an incisive contribution to a new field of study, by exploring the history, theory and practice of moving image advertising, and emphasising the dynamic and lasting relationships between print, film, broadcasting and advertising cultures.
<http://bit.ly/2bfECm5>



I'M BUFFY AND YOU'RE HISTORY

Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Contemporary Feminism

By Patricia Pender, I.B. Tauris; Investigating Cult TV Series; 256pp; hardback £59, ISBN 9781780767451; paperback £16.99, ISBN 9781780767468
Buffy the Vampire Slayer gave contemporary TV viewers an exhilarating alternative to the trope of a hapless, attractive blonde woman victimised by a murderous male villain. With its strong, capable heroine, witty dialogue and a feminist creator, the cult show became one of the most widely analysed texts in contemporary popular culture. Thirteen years after it ended *Buffy* remains an internet and media presence and is studied internationally. Here, Patricia Pender explores the Slayer's postmodern politics, her position as a third-wave feminist icon, and her fandom and legacy in popular culture. This is a fresh and challenging contribution to the growing literature on the pitfalls and pleasures of a great cult TV show.
www.ibtauris.com



At the End of the Street in the Shadow

Orson Welles and the City

MATTHEW ASPREY GEAR

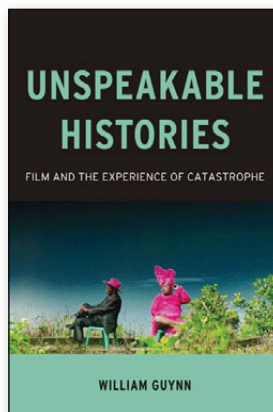


WALLFLOWER

£22.00 PB · 978-0-231-17341-451

"A timely book that pushes past many debates dotting the beaten path of Orson Wells criticism to consider the representation of the city, both as a physical location and an imaginary social space, in his film oeuvre. . . a historically grounded, globally conscious study that urges us to consider the importance of the built environment in Welles's mises-en scene, as well as his abiding concern with the politics of modernization."

—Catherine L. Benamou, author of *It's All True: Orson Welles's Pan-American Odyssey*



Unspeakable Histories

Film and the Experience of Catastrophe

WILLIAM GUYNN

£22.00 PB · 978-0-231-17797-9
Film and Culture Series

"Guynn's interpretive readings are insightful and downright brilliant."

—Robert A. Rosenstone, author of *History on Film/Film on History*

"An eloquent meditation on cinema's capacity to put us in touch, in every sense of the word, with the presence of the past. Guynn's study makes a sustained argument for the place of affect, sensation, experience, and myth in our historical imagination."

—Debarati Sanyal, author of *Memory and Complicity: Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance*



CUP.COLUMBIA.EDU · CUPBLOG.ORG

Customers in United Kingdom, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and South Africa,
please contact our UK distributor WILEY via email: customer@wiley.com



BFI
Film
Forever

CRY OF THE CITY

'SIODMAK BRINGS A TERRIFIC NEOREALIST STYLE TO THIS TENSE, PUNCHY 1948 MOVIE'
THE GUARDIAN

AVAILABLE ON BLU-RAY AND DVD ON 22 AUGUST
BFI MEMBERS ENJOY 15% OFF

BFI SHOP

Ray Harryhausen's Talos Awakes



hand-made by
*Raven
Armoury*

Limited Editions Authorised by The Ray & Diana Harryhausen Foundation
Raven Armoury, Thaxted, England - www.ravenarmoury.com
Forge & Gallery: +44 (0)1371 870 486 Email: simon@ravenarmoury.com

Based on effects characters created by Ray Harryhausen for a Charles H. Schneer Production.
TM & © Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

*Please note: Talos is not available to ship to Japan.

THE
NATIONAL
GALLERY

BEYOND Caravaggio

12 Oct 2016 – 15 Jan 2017

CREDIT SUISSE

Partner of the National Gallery

Book now
Members go free
nationalgallery.org.uk

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, The Taking of Christ (detail), 1602. On indefinite loan to the National Gallery of Ireland from the Jesuit Community, Leeson St, Dublin who acknowledge the kind generosity of the late Dr Marie Leo-Wilson. Photo © The National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin

BFI
Film
Forever

FILM IS FRAGILE

Help protect our nation's film collection

DONATE NOW

Your support will help preserve film forever

bfi.org.uk/filmisfragile



MAKING MOVIES, KICK FILM AND ALLFILM PRESENT

NOMINEE
BEST FOREIGN LANGUAGE FILM
GOLDEN GLOBE®
2016



SHORTLISTED
BEST FOREIGN LANGUAGE FILM
ACADEMY AWARDS®
2016

“Rousingly enjoyable”

Sight and Sound

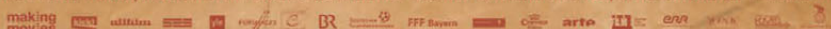


A FILM BY **KLAUS HÄRÖ**

THE FENCER

MÄRT AVANDI URSULA RATASEPP HENDRIK TOOMPERE

DIRECTOR KLAUS HÄRÖ SCRIPT ANNA HEINÄMAA DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY TUOMO HUTRI COSTUME DESIGNER TIINA KAUKANEN
MUSIC GERT WILDEN JR EDITING TAMMET TASUJA, UELI CHRISTEN PRODUCTION DESIGNER JAAGUP ROOMET CO-PRODUCERS IVO FELT, JÖRG BUNDSCHUH PRODUCERS KAI NORDBERG, KAARLE AHO

making movies 

IN SELECTED CINEMAS SEPTEMBER 30

www.thefencerfilm.co.uk

READERS' LETTERS

Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at *Sight & Sound*, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN
Email: S&S@bfi.org.uk

PROTECT AND SURVIVE?

Are there, as Nick James claims in his editorial ('The bright side', *S&S*, August), post-Brexit parallels for the UK film industry with the 1920s?

The end of the silent era was exceptional for the degree of cross-border co-operation it engendered – between Ufa in Berlin and Gainsborough, for example – which might have survived well into the talkie era had it not been for fascism.

But national interests quashed such enterprises. The protectionism inherent in the Cinematograph Films Act of 1927 gained the upper hand. It worked after a fashion: though the 'quota quickies' spawned by the act generated disdain, the British film industry survived.

However, as Geoffrey Macnab illustrates in his article 'Ways of seeing' for the same issue, the universal access that modern technology affords us will no longer permit protectionism.

Stephane Duckett *London*

THE STATE WE'RE IN

In 'The bright side' editorial you invite readers to think of further positives regarding the future of film in the United Kingdom post-Brexit. Alas, I can only offer the idea that at government level there needs to be a more serious commitment to cinema under the umbrella of culture.

A single secretary of state for culture, media and sport seems inadequate. Separate cabinet posts, one for sport and the other for culture and media, would benefit both sectors; then perhaps all those who adore cinema but feel anxious about its future in this country right now would feel they are being supported.

Richard Sherwood-Farnfield *Maidstone*

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

Hannah McGill's Object Lesson is always enjoyable and informative. But was *Nanook of the North* (1922) omitted deliberately from the story of record players on film ('Just for the record', *S&S*, August)? Apart from its meaning for contemporary audiences, Nanook performing enjoyment and reverence for a wind-up gramophone must surely have informed Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo* (1981) – and possibly even the wonderful *Embrace of the Serpent*.

Susi Arnott *by email*

A BUSTED FLUSH

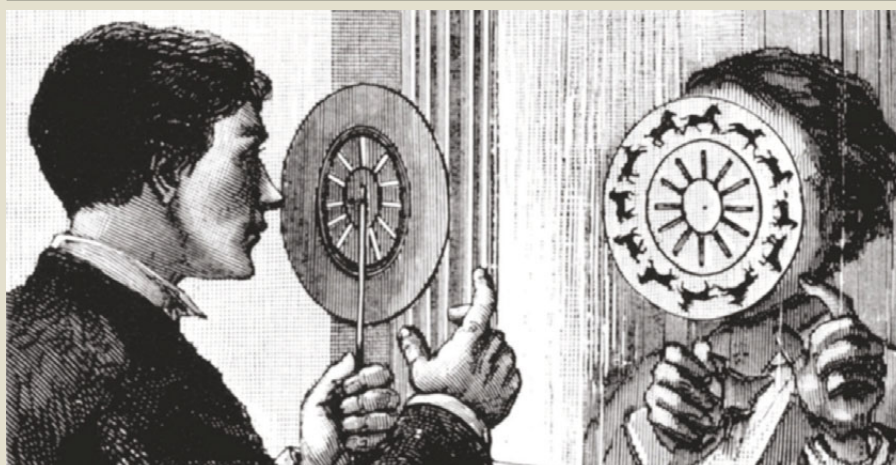
Contrary to Hannah McGill's assertion ('All cisterns are go', *S&S*, September), *Psycho* did not feature the first flushing of a toilet in American film, though it was the first time a flushing toilet had been seen. A toilet is flushed loudly off screen in John Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940).

Paul Nicholls *Northwich, Cheshire*

SOCIETY NOTES

Thank you for the timely round-up of the thriving state of community cinema in the UK ('Keep it in the community', *S&S*, August). One minor quibble: the Cinema for All (then

LETTER OF THE MONTH BACK IN THE LOOP



In the August issue of *S&S*, the 'Ways of seeing' block of articles understandably concentrated on the future of the cinema theatre, its audience and the type of feature films presented there. Even though I agree that the public, communal space for seeing films is a major issue, to my mind a more intriguing and pressing question is what exactly are the moving images we watch today, in any form – an issue that Nick Pinkerton addressed up to a point in his article 'The great levelling'.

By that I do not mean what types of narrative feature films are the ones that get most viewers, but what is the essence of these moving images that we watch in huge numbers, *à la carte* and fragmented: gifs, online amateur videos, mobile phone videos,

posts in social media, etc? Though I am not aware of any statistics, I think it is pretty safe to assume that most of these are not narrative – or not in any traditional sense.

Gifs are particularly interesting, since they connect new media directly to a pre-cinematic and early cinema mode of exhibiting moving images: the never-ending discs of the Phenakistoscope and the equally never-ending loops of film in the Kinetoscope (and numerous other similar 'old-media' devices). An exhibition of a small number of frames repeated ad infinitum and ad nauseam (especially suited for pornography) that brings to mind Tom Gunning's non-narrative 'cinema of attractions'.

Theodoros Natsinas *Greece*

British Federation of Film Societies) Booking Scheme was an entirely separate endeavour from the BFI's booking agency. It was set up in 2007 by the late John Salisbury, Ros Hill and myself, its roots being in the block-booking schemes run by staunch regional groups in the south-west (led by Paul Schilling) and Yorkshire (Tony Davison). Regional groups such as these kept the BFFS alive in some pretty dark days.

Julia Vickers *Reading*

CAN'T STOP THE MUSIC

Pamela Hutchinson's piece on current tendencies in silent film accompaniment ('Silent harmonies', *S&S*, September) was very welcome, but she is too kind.

As someone whose silent film education usually involved 16mm or 9.5mm prints projected in Henri Langlois-style silence, I used to look forward to screenings with live music and had many wonderful experiences of great films made even greater by inspired accompaniment. Today, the audience (or home viewer watching a DVD) is all too often faced with a group of musicians who appear to have seized on a film as a ready-made music video to accompany their performance (and yes, British Sea Power, I'm referring to you). We all

know why this kind of presentation is being encouraged – bums on seats – but it does little to foster an appreciation of the joys of silents.

Perhaps the worst instance of silent film abuse I've suffered was a screening of the 1925 Jewish-American film *His People* in Leeds a couple of years ago, with a live klezmer band and a ludicrously stretched 16:9 image. When I complained I was told, "We thought the audience would like the biggest possible picture to accompany the musicians!"

What a relief to attend screenings in Bologna or Pordenone or at the Kennington Bioscope, confident of hearing sensitive music by performers with a deep and obvious love of silent film.

Dave Howell *Ilkley*

Additions and corrections

September p.68 *Almost Holy*, 15, 96m 11s; p.70 *Asterix The Mansions of the Gods*, PG, 85m 39s; p.71 *Black*, 18, 93m 34s; p.74 *The Confession Living the War on Terror*, 15, 95m 47s; p.64 *Cosmos*, 15, 102m 15s; p.76 *400 Days*, 15, 90m 6s; p.79 *Jim The James Foley Story*, 15, 111m 27s; p.82 *Lights Out*, Aspect ratio is 2.35:1; p.84 *Pete's Dragon*, PG, 102m 36s; p.86 *River*, Not submitted for theatrical classification, Video certificate: 15, Running time: 83m 19s; p.87 *Star Trek Beyond*, USA/People's Republic of China 2016, ©Paramount Pictures Corporation, Paramount Pictures and Skydance present in association with Alibaba Pictures, Huahua Media a Bad Robot, Sneaky Shark, Perfect Storm Entertainment production, In association with Perfect Storm Entertainment; p.88 *Swallows and Amazons*, PG, 96m 53s; p.93 *Wiener-Dog*, 15, 88m 8s

HEAVEN'S GATE



The plaintive final moments of Michael Cimino's epic western find its lead protagonist all at sea, embittered by failure and betrayal

By Martyn Conterio

How strange it is for a western to end at sea. Taking us far away from the majesty of Wyoming's open range and leaving behind a violent world, where harsh social conditions forced working class toilers of the land into rustling cattle as a means to survive, the coda of *Heaven's Gate* (1980) adroitly ties together its class-conscious themes, decades-spanning narrative and character study in a short sequence set on a swish yacht anchored off the New England coast.

Cimino's costly flop – in reality New Hollywood's Sistine Chapel, despite being critically derided on its initial release – portrays the battle for America's self-image. It juxtaposes the beautiful myth enshrined in Emma Lazarus's sonnet *The New Colossus* (1883) – “Give me your tired, your poor / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free” – with the cruel reality: Ivy Leaguers consolidating their iron grip on the land and politicising the cause through an old boys' network that spreads all the way to the Senate and White House. Cimino's history lesson – loosely based on the Johnson County War, a series of conflicts between cattle barons and small homesteaders in Wyoming from 1889-1893 – is a populist depiction of how modern America was built and how the Wild West was tamed.

As romantic and freewheeling with historical facts as any John Ford picture, *Heaven's Gate's*

class-conflict polemic was made at a time when the nation was still feeling bruised and bloodied by Vietnam (the subject of Cimino's Oscar-winning *The Deer Hunter*, 1978) and events such as Watergate. Cold War paranoias also loomed large. The European immigrants on the ‘death list’ drawn up by the malicious cattle barons in the film are deemed not only common thieves, but dangerous anarchists and agitators.

In the final act, Ella Watson (Isabelle Huppert) and John L. Bridges (Jeff Bridges), the lover and friend respectively of lawman Jim Averill (Kris Kristofferson), are gunned down by Frank Canton (Sam Waterston) and his posse in revenge for Averill's support for the immigrants in their battle with the Wyoming Stock Growers Association and its band of hired killers. Afterwards, the film jumps forward more than a decade to an entirely new location: Newport, Rhode Island, in 1903.

The suggestion of a life of Sisyphean repetition is alluded to in this haunting, plaintive final scene, as its establishing shot and closing image are near identical: aboard a luxury yacht, a figure walks the deck at sunset.

Down below, Averill, dressed in aristocratic evening attire, enters a plush drawing room. While the interior is fancy, the overall feeling is one of airlessness. *Heaven's Gate* – a work of such extraordinary natural vistas – bows out in this tiny space. Cimino has condemned his lead to suffer for the privileges of his wealth and failings

Cimino has condemned his lead to suffer for the privileges of his wealth. Averill has it all but the personal cost is soul-destroying

as a man. Like Charles Foster Kane, Averill has it all but the personal cost is soul-destroying.

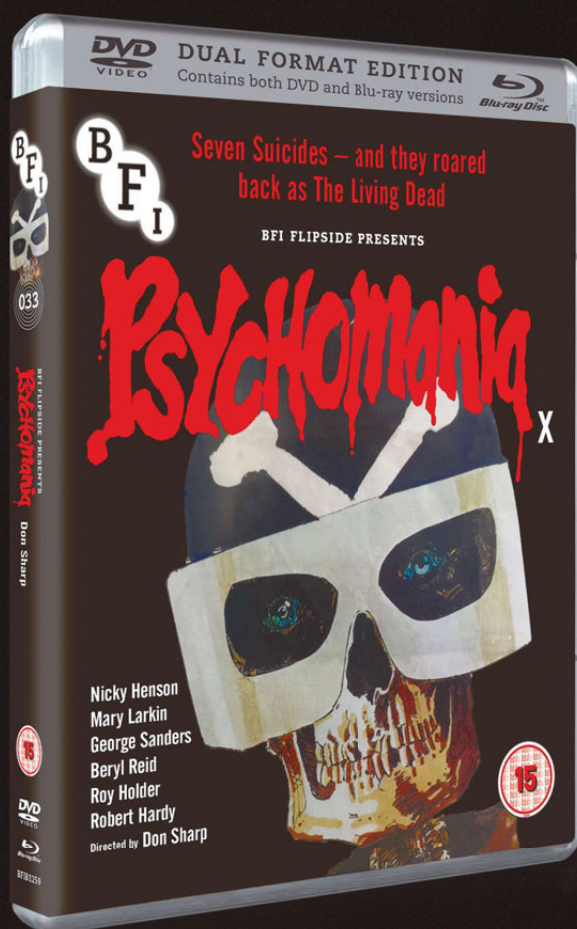
In the drawing room he stares in a mirror, then sits down and gazes at his wife sleeping soundly. But the look etched on his face is not one of contentment, more of someone who is barely keeping it together. The way the room is lit by the sunlight shining through the porthole cleverly shades Averill's eyes, reinforcing the impression of a miserable man stewing over the past.

A butler enters, setting down a tray of food and drink, which causes Mrs Averill to wake up. “I'd like a cigarette,” she says sleepily – the only line of dialogue in the scene – and the husband dutifully obliges her. The physical distance between them hints at a loveless marriage. It's evident in the way Averill sits on the *chaise longue* and leans over with his arm stretched to light the cigarette. They share a glance so empty it's crushing. When he gets up to leave, his bottom lip trembles. Averill is on the verge of tears, but Cimino leaves it at that. Anything stronger would tonally jar.

The Harvard-educated former sheriff and egalitarian idealist demonstrated bravery during the Johnson County War. But having lost his job, numerous friends and his lover, Jim headed east; back home to the succour of an upper-class milieu. Canton, in an exchange at the Stock Growers Association's clubhouse early in the film, accuses Averill, a former member, of acting against the business interests of his own class. Jim replies: “You're not my class, Canton. You never will be. You'd have to die first and be born again.” For all the macho swagger in such a rebuke, betrayal is the root of Averill's woes. Protected by the lap of luxury and the passing of time, Jim recognises he betrayed not only himself and his principles, but also those he fought alongside. **S**



BFI FLIPSIDE PRESENTS PSYCHOMANIA



Newly remastered
by the BFI National Archive

AVAILABLE FROM 23 SEPTEMBER

ALSO AVAILABLE FROM BFI FLIPSIDE



**BFI MEMBERS
ENJOY 15% OFF**





BFI LONDON FILM FESTIVAL

in partnership with



5 – 16 OCTOBER 2016

See the world's best new films.
First.

BOOK FROM 15 SEP

Principal Partner

**AMERICAN
EXPRESS**

Supported by

 Department
for Culture
Media & Sport



Main Sponsors



Royal Bank of Canada

virgin atlantic 

Media Partner

Sight&Sound

  @bfi #lff

Discover Festival highlights on
BFIPLAYER